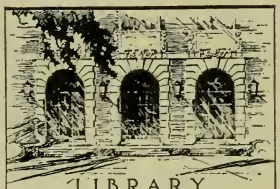

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MERKLAND.

A STORY

OF

SCOTTISH LIFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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MERKLAND.

CHAPTER I.

"She wandered below the shining skies,
By burn and glen went she,
Till the sunlight sickened in her eyes,
And her heart grew faint to see.
Ah! fair art thou, sweet Hope, I trow,
Fairer than mortal maiden.
But an thou be glad, with sick hearts and sad,
Are thy weary wooers laden."

OLD BALLAD.

THE bright weeks of May stole on rapidly, and Anne had made no advance in her search. Little Alice Aytoun when she came to visit her, clung round her neck anxiously, lifting up beseeching eyes to her face, but Anne had no

word of hopeful answer to give. Her own heart was sinking day by day; the window of Patrick Lillie's study was still shut up and dark; the old servant whom they had left behind them could give no information as to their return. Anne was compelled to confess to herself that her plan had failed—that except for her dim and mysterious knowledge of these singular Lillies, she had not made a single step of progress.

Then Lewis wrote letters, slightly querulous, requiring her presence at home—and Mrs. Catherine sent one characteristic note promising, "if ye will be a good bairn and come back, maybe to go with ye myself, when the weather is more suiting for the seaside." She was doing no good in Aberford; so with a heavy heart Anne returned home.

The first day after her arrival at Merkland, she visited the Mill. With what strange feelings swelling in her heart did she draw the child to her side, and take into her own its small soft hand. The little strange exotic Lilie, the wonder of the quiet parish—was she indeed a Lilias Rutherford?—a daughter of the

banished Norman?—her own nearest kin and relative?

"Jacky Morison's been up this morning already, Miss Anne," said Mrs. Melder. "Indeed, and ye may think muckle o' yoursel, Lilie my woman—baith leddy and maid comin anceerrant to see ye, the first thing after their homecoming. She's an awfu' strange lassie yon, Miss Anne; ane would think she had gotten some word o' the bairn that naebody else kens. She was aye unco fond o' her, but now it's *Miss* Lilie every word."

Strange indeed! these intuitive perceptions of Jacky's puzzled Anne greatly.

"That was what they called Lilie at home," said the child thoughtfully.

"Ay, listen till her; I dinna misdoubt it, Miss Anne—the folk that sent a' yon bonnie things, maun be weel off in this world."

"Will you come and walk with me, Lilie?" said Anne: "see what a beautiful day it is."

The child assented eagerly, and tying on her bonnet, Anne led her out. They went to the foot of the tree on which were carved the names of those two exiles—Norman and Marion. It was a fit resting-place for their sister

and their child. Anne seated herself on the turf, and placed Lilie by her side.

"Can you tell me where your home is, Lilie?"

"Away yonder," said Lilie, "far away, over the sea."

"And what like is it?" said Anne, "do you remember?"

"A bonnie, bonnie place—where there's brighter light and warmer days; and grand flowers far bigger than any in Strathoran; but its lang, lang to sail, and whiles there were loud winds and storms, and Lilie wasna weel."

"Would you like to go home, Lilie?" said Anne.

"I would like to go to mamma. I would like to go to my own mamma; but—mamma doesna call yon place home."

"What does she call it, Lilie?"

"When mamma was putting Lilie into the big ship, she said Lilie was coming home; and maybe she would come hersel for Lilie."

"And how did she look when she said that?" said Anne.

The child began to cry.

"She put down her head—my mamma's bonnie head—down into her hands, this way; and then she began to greet, like me—oh, my mamma!"

Anne drew the little girl's head into her lap, and wiped away the tears.

"You would be very glad to see mamma, Lilie, if she came here? she will come perhaps some day."

"Do you ken my mamma?" said Lilie eagerly. "Did she tell you she was coming?"

"No," said Anne, "but when she comes, you will take my hand, and say, 'Mamma, this is my friend;' will you not, and introduce me to her?"

The child looked brightly up:

"Eh, Lilie will be blythe! blythe!—but if mamma were coming, what would Lilie call you?"

"You would call me aunt," said Anne, her eyes filling as she looked upon the little face lying on her knee. "Your Aunt Anne that found you out, when you came a little stranger to the Mill."

Lilie rose to wind her small arms round Anne's neck.

"But you're no Lilie's aunt—I wish you were Lilie's aunt—then you would take me to live at Merkland."

"Would you like to live at Merkland, Lilie?"

"Whiles," said the child; "no in bonnie days like this, but whiles—Jacky says I'm a lady—am I a lady?"

"Not till you are old, like me; you will be a lady then."

"But Jacky says I'm a *young* lady," reiterated Lilie; "does Jacky no ken?"

"We will ask mamma when she comes," said Anne.

The little face became radiant:

"Eh! when mamma comes!—will you be glad too, like Lilie?—and will they a' be there? Papa and Lawrie? What way do you put your head down? then your eyelashes come upon your cheek, and then you grow like—"

"Like whom, Lilie?"

"My papa. If mamma comes, will they a' come—papa and Lawrie?"

"Who is Lawrie, Lilie?" The name was a still further corroboration; there was something touching in the exile calling his son by his father's name.

"Lilie's brother. He is near as tall as you, and he's like papa."

"And you think I am like papa," said Anne, tremulously.

"Whiles, when you hold down your head, and look sad."

"Does papa look sad?"

"No," said Lilie, "but when you look as if you would greet, then you grow like him; and Lawrie never greets, and yet he's like him, too. What way is that?"

"And do they call you Miss Lilie at home?" said Anne, at once to evade the difficult question submitted to her, and to ascertain something of the worldly comforts of her banished brother. Mrs. Melder's guess was no doubt correct: the box which had been sent to Lilie could come from no *poor* house.

"No papa, or mamma, or Lawrie, but the maids and English John, and José—for papa's no like Robert Melder; he's a rich gentleman."

"And why did they send you here?" exclaimed Anne, more as expressing her own astonishment, than addressing the child.

"Lilie was very ill—had to lie in her bed—mamma thought I would die, and it was to get strong again. See," Lilie disengaged herself from Anne, and ran away along the bank of the Oran, returning ruddy and breathless, "Lilie's strong now."

"And why did you not tell me this before?" said Anne.

"Lilie didna mind—Lilie didna ken how to speak;" and the child looked confused and bewildered. By means of her broken sentences, however, Anne made out that Lilie had been brought home by a Juana, a Spanish nurse, and had been accustomed to hear the servants in her father's house speak the liquid foreign tongue, which she was already beginning to forget. That being suddenly brought into the rustic Scottish dwelling, and seeing, with the quick perception of a child, that its inhabitants were of the same rank as her former attendants, the child had naturally fancied that their language must also be, not the cultivated English, the speaking of which was an accomplishment, but the more ornate tongue which she had been accustomed to hear among their equals in her

own country. Then Mrs. Melder's dialect still further puzzled the lonely child, who, under the care of Juana, had spoken nothing but Spanish during the voyage, which she thought so long a one, so that the ideas of the little head became quite perplexed and ravelled; and it was not until she had mastered in a considerable degree this new Scottish tongue, that the more refined words learned from "mamma" began to steal once more into her childish memory.

But Anne's attempted questioning, respecting the person who brought Lilie to the Mill, produced no satisfactory answer. The remembrance had become hazy already; and save for a general impression of discomfort—one of those vague indefinite times of childish suffering and unhappiness, which are by no means either light or trivial, howsoever we may think of them, when we are involved in more mature calamities, Lilie's memory failed her. She could give no account of the interim, between her voyage under the government of Juana, and her transference to the rule of Mrs. Melder.

To Mrs. Catherine, Anne had said little of the Lillies—to Lewis nothing. Their

connexion with Norman had nothing to do with the proof of his innocence, and though Christian Lillie's strange words had occupied her own mind night and day since she heard them, she yet did not think it either necessary or prudent to make them a matter of conversation.

Again, she remained in so much doubt about this singular brother and sister—their strange seclusion, and grief, and inactivity—their mysterious and abrupt removal, which evidently was to avoid meeting her, perplexed herself so much that she did not venture to confide even in Mrs. Catherine. She brooded over her secret by herself; she slept little—rested little — took long, solitary, meditative walks, and much exercise, and felt herself more than ever abstracted from the busy little world about her. She was becoming a solitary, cheerless woman, cherishing in silent sadness one great hope; a hope with which strangers might not intermeddle—which was foolishness to her own nearest friends—which might never be realized upon this earth—nevertheless a hope in which her whole nature was concentrated—the very essence and aim of her being.

She did not even reveal to Mrs. Catherine her suspicion, her hope, that Lilie was the child of her banished brother. She cherished it in her own mind as a secret strength and comfort. She endeavoured in all gentle ways to supply the want of the mother after whom the little heart yearned, and she was successful. Lilie began to call her aunt—to watch in childish anxiety for her daily visits—to wander about anywhere, unwearied and joyous, so long as Anne was leading her, and to look to her at all times as her dearest friend and protector. Then these childish confidences — these snatches of dear remembrance of the far-away mamma—these glances into the household of the exile! Anne drew new invigoration, strength, and hope from these, in the darkest times of her depression.

Yet all endeavours for her great end were stayed—no one lifted a hand in the cause of the injured man—no one made any exertion to deliver him. In the bright sunshine of that leafy month of June her heart sickened within her. She longed to return again to the place where something might be done, where with a

prospect of success, or without it, she might still labour; she might still engage in the search.

In the meantime, everything went on peaceably in the parish of Strathoran. Jeanie Coulter and Walter Foreman had made up their mind, and were speedily to be married. Ada Mina, in the glory of being bridesmaid and bride's sister, had almost forgotten Giles Sympelton. Marjory Falconer was very remarkably quiet; she was "beginning to settle." Mrs. Bairnsfather said, maliciously, "and it was high time." Mr. Fergusson's work was advancing in the bleak lands of Lochend and Loelyin. Mr. Coulter and he were very busy, and in high spirits. Lord Gillravidge had left Strathoran. The fair country, in the height of its summer beauty, had no attractions for Lord Gillravidge. There was no game to slaughter, and other kind of excitement, the quiet Norland parish had never possessed any.

Mr. Fitzherbert was left behind; he was now lord paramount at Strathoran, and a very great man, intensely detested by the Macalpines of Oranmore, and spoken of with bitter derision

and disdain by all the other inhabitants of Strathoran. He had displeased Lord Gillravidge by being the occasion of Giles Sympelton's desertion, and was left behind half as a punishment for that offence, and half as a promotion for counterbalancing good offices. Mr. Fitzherbert's feelings concerning it were of the same mixed description. He was immensely bored with the intolerable weariness of the country, while at the same time he enjoyed his temporary lordship, and ordered and stormed magnificently in the desecrated house of the Sutherlands.

We should not have intruded ourselves into his disagreeable presence had that been all. But Mr. Fitzherbert in his dreariness, when he had exercised his petty despotism to its full extent—had cursed the servants, bullied Mr. Whittret, and asserted his predominance in various other pleasant and edifying ways—was forced to invent further amusement for himself. Surely, there never was unhappy individual with small brains and a craving for excitement more miserably placed.

It chanced one day that Flora Macalpine,

Mrs. Fergusson's very pretty and very bashful nurserymaid, unwarily entered the contested by-way, while walking with the Woodsmuir children. Mr. Fitzherbert met her there, and the first harsh sound of his command to leave the road, was very much less disagreeable than the softening of tone which followed. Mr. Fitzherbert began to admire the pretty Highland girl, and to venture to express to her his admiration—to her, a Macalpine! Flora hurried from the by-way with her charge, in burning shame and indignation.

But Mr. Fitzherbert was not to be got rid of so easily. Flora did not know the might of *ennui* which made him seek out her quiet walks, and waylay her so perseveringly. She avoided him in every possible way; but still he found means to persecute her with his odious flattery and attentions. Flora was engaged, moreover, and tall Angus Macalpine, her handsome bridegroom elect, and Duncan Roy, her brother, were equally irate, and equally contented to have a decided personal plea for punishing the obnoxious jackal of Lord Gillravidge. So Flora reluctantly suffered herself to be made a party in a

plan, which should ensnare her tormentor, and pour out upon him, in full flood, the rage and contempt of the Macalpines.

It was a beautiful evening in June: Mr. Fitzherbert had just received from Lord Gillravidge, the much wished-for call to London.

In great glee he put the letter in his pocket, took his hat, and sallied out. His splendid hair, his magnificent whiskers and moustache were in the most superlative order. Flora Macalpine had intimated to him bashfully that she would be in the contested by-way, near the stepping-stones, at seven o'clock; it is always pleasant to be victorious. Mr. Fitzherbert had no doubt that the power of his fascinations had smitten the simple cottager, and accordingly in perfect good-humour with himself, and very much disposed to accept Flora's homage, with the utmost condescension, he set out for the stepping-stones.

Close by the trysting place, in the slanting June sunlight, screening himself with the thick foliage of a "bourtree-bush," stood tall Angus Macalpine watching for his prey. Flora, nervous and trembling, stood beside him; she

felt she was very much out of place, and did not at all like her position, but that strong, thickset little brother of hers, Duncan Roy, was squatting at her feet, concealing the flaming red head, which might have alarmed their victim, among the surrounding leaves, and Angus, bending down his handsome head with its curling fair hair, and healthful, good-looking face, was very carefully supporting her, and guarding against her running away. So, after all, there was nothing improper in it, and she could not help herself. The idea of the compulsion comforted Flora.

Footsteps approached by-and-by. It was not Mr. Fitzherbert. It was George, the Falcon's Craig groom, and Johnnie Halflin, to whom Duncan Roy had communicated some hint of his intention. The punishment was far too just, the fun far too good, for these mischief-loving lads to let it slip. They had come to assist the Macalpines. George was making horrible faces. His veins were perfectly swoln with the might of his suppressed laughter. Johnnie had a little pink pocket-handkerchief—a keepsake from Bessie—thrust bodily into his

capacious mouth. The Macalpines were graver; a quiet glee was shooting from the eyes of Duncan Roy, and Angus sometimes smiled—but the smile was an angry one.

"But, Angus," whispered Flora; "mind, you maun promise that you'll no hurt him?"

"I'll try," was the emphatic response.

"Eh! but Duncan—Angus! Dinna hurt him, for ony sake. Just fear him, or I'll rin away this moment."

It was easier said than done. That mighty arm of Angus Macalpine's might have restrained a man of his own inches without any particular strain.

"We'll no hurt him, Flora," said Duncan, encouragingly. "We'll only douk him, forbye—Listen! There he is—in behint the bush, lads. Angus, let Flora go."

It was indeed Fitzherbert. They could hear his swaggering step as he advanced, whistling gaily.

"I'll whistle ye!" exclaimed the angry Angus, in a strong undertone. "If ye were ance in my hands, my lad, ye'll whistle or ye get out again!"

Flora had only time to speak another earnest remonstrance, when her admirer appeared.

The ambush had been skilfully contrived. The unsuspected Fitzherbert advanced gaily. Poor Flora trembled and shrank back—the instinctive delicacy of her simple womanly nature overpowering her with shame. To meet this odious man at all, if it were but for a second, was a disgrace to her, even though Angus and Duncan were waiting at her side.

Mr. Fitzherbert began a gallant speech—he attempted to take Flora's hand. The girl shrank back to the shelter of the bourtree-bush—and in another moment, Fitzherbert was struggling in the stalwart arms of Angus Macalpine—an embrace as unexpected as it was overpowering.

"Haud the ill tongue of ye!" exclaimed Duncan Roy, as he seized the struggling legs of the unhappy adventurer, and held him fast. "If ye say another word, ye shall rue it a' your days."

"Do you want to rob me?" cried Fitzherbert. "I haven't my purse on me, good fellows. Let me go, or you shall suffer for it."

"Rob ye!" Tall Angus Macalpine seized his collar with an exclamation of disgust, and shook him violently. "Rob ye! Ye pitiful animal, wha would file their fingers with your filthy siller! Duncan, give me the plaid."

The other two auxiliaries were standing by expending their pent-up laughter. Johnnie Halflin bestirred himself now, to hand to Angus one of the plaids that lay on the grass beside him.

Threats, entreaties, vociferation, rage, all were in vain. The plaid was bound tightly round the unhappy Fitzherbert, strapping his arms to his side. Then Duncan confined in like manner his struggling feet. Then they laid him down on the grass.

"Hushaba!" sung Johnnie Halflin as, with laughter not to be suppressed, they viewed the ludicrous bondage of their foe. "Eh, man, ye're a muckle baby to lie there, and do naething but squeal."

"What gars ye no fight wi' your neives, like a man?" cried George.

"Do you no see? He's putting a' his strength into the feet of him. See, woman

Flora, he's walopping like the fishes in the Portoran boats when they're new catched. *He's* new catched, too. Gie him a taste o' the water."

"If ye had dune what ye had to do against us, like a man," said Angus Macalpine, solemnly, addressing the miserable captive, who lay prone before these shafts of rustic wit, upon the grass at their feet, "we might have throoshen ye like a man, and gi'en ye fair play; but because ye're a vermin that have creeped in to quiet places, where there was nae man to chastise ye—and because ye have tried to breathe your ill breath into the purest heart in a' Strathoran, ye shall hae only a vermin's punishment. Duncan, ye can get your shears. I'll haud the sheep."

Duncan advanced in grim mirth, holding a pair of mighty shears. Angus knelt down upon the grass, and held Fitzherbert with his arm. The operation commenced. The punishment was the bitterest they could have chosen. Duncan Roy squatting at his side, with methodic composure and malicious glee, began to clip, and cut away, in jagged and uneven bits, his cherished whiskers, his beautiful moustache, his magnificent hair. The

victim roared and groaned, entreated and threatened, in vain — the relentless operators proceeded, in their work—the scissors entered into his soul.

A light, quick step came suddenly along the path. They did not hear it, so overwhelming was the laughter of the lookers-on, till Marjory Falconer stood in the midst of them. Duncan's scissors suddenly ceased. The victim looked up in momentary hope, and again shrank back despairing. He by no means desired to throw himself upon the tender mercies of Miss Falconer.

"What is the matter?" cried Marjory. "Flora, are you here! What is the matter? what are they about?"

"Oh! Miss Falconer," exclaimed Flora, who, between shame and laughter, was now in tears, "it's the gentleman from Strathoran—and it's Duncan and Angus—and he wouldna let me be, and they're—"

An involuntary burst of laughter choked Flora's penitence. The lifted head of her brother, with its look of comic appeal, as he held up his shears before Miss Falconer, and

silently asked her permission to proceed—the grim steadfastness with which Angus continued to hold the victim on the grass—the vain attempt of Miss Falconer to look gravely displeased and dignified—the fierce struggles of Fitzherbert—Flora could not bear it: she ran in behind the bourtree-bush.

Marjory stood undecided for a moment. She had great influence with the Macalpines and their class, as a strong and firm character always has. She thought for an instant of what people would say, almost for the first time in her life. Then she looked at the ludicrous scene before her—the just punishment of poor Flora's persecution. The prudent resolution faded away—she yielded to the fun and to the justice. She could not put her veto upon it.

"George, do you go home—you are not wanted. Duncan, have you finished?"

"Na," said the rejoicing Duncan, beginning with double zeal to ply his redoubtable shears. "He's a camstarie beast, this ane—he tak's lang shearing—but we're winning on, Mem."

George reluctantly turned away. His mis-

tress's orders were not to be trifled with, he knew. Little Bessie's pink handkerchief was in Johnnie Halflin's mouth again. Flora remained behind the bourtree-bush, terrified to look upon her tormentor's agonized face. Marjory Falconer looked on.

The blood was rushing in torrents to her hot cheeks already. She could have put an end to this if she would: instead of that she had encouraged it. She had yielded to the mirthful impulse: now she was paying the penalty in one of her overpowering agonies of shame.

"Now—now!" she exclaimed, as Duncan, with methodic accuracy, finished his operation on one side of Mr. Fitzherbert's fiery countenance, "that will do now—let him go."

The operators looked up in disappointment.

"Do let him go; let me see him released before I leave you."

Duncan and Angus looked at each other.

"Weel," said Angus, smiling grimly, "he's gey weel; ye'll think again, my lad, before ye offer to lay your filthy fingers on a Macalpine, or ony ither lass in the countryside. Now, Duncan—"

They began to free him from his bondage. Angus took one end of the plaid which confined his arms—Duncan the other. The process was satisfactory, but by no means gentle; over and over they rolled him, and when the hapless Fitzherbert found himself at last at liberty, he was lying within the green verge of the Oran—the soft waters embracing him. His first struggle threw him further in; and when he rose at last, spluttering with wrath and water, his clothes wet, his face scarred with the pebbles, and shorn of its hirsute glories—all his tormentors were gone. Light of foot, and conversant with all the by-ways, they had dispersed, considerably against the will of the Macalpines, but in obedience to the command of Miss Falconer, and the entreaties of Flora.

In burning rage and mortification Mr. Fitzherbert stalked back to Strathoran. In the distance, upon the other side of the river, he could see the retreat of the Macalpines; it was a fruitless thing vowing vengeance upon them. He had done his worst; they were out of his power.

But Mr. Fitzherbert's mortification and

rage, reached a climax when he looked upon his sad mutilation—cruel as Hanun the son of Nahash, and his artful counsellors of the children of Ammon, the scissors of the remorseless Duncan had swept away one entire half of Mr. Fitzherbert's adornments. It must all go, cherished and dearly beloved as it was—the flowing luxuriance of the one side, must be sacrificed to the barbarous stubble of the other. Alas the day! How should he meet Lord Gillravidge! how account for the holocaust! Mr. Fitzherbert was fitly punished—he was in despair.

Marjory Falconer hurried along the road to Merkland, little less despairing than Mr. Fitzherbert. She was bitterly ashamed; her face was burning with passionate blushes. She needed no one to remind her of her loss of dignity; the strong and powerful vitality of her womanhood avenged itself completely. Like Jeanie Coulter, or Alice Aytoun, or even Anne Ross herself, she knew Marjory Falconer could never be!—nor like the cheerful active sister Martha of the Portoran Manse. Marjory did not blush more deeply when that last name glided into her memory; that was impossible—no human verdict, or condemnation

would have abashed her so entirely as did her own strong, clear, unhesitating judgment; but she looked uncomfortable and uneasy. Another person now might be involved in the blame of her misdoings; the reflected shadow of those extravagancies might fall upon one, of whom many tongues were sufficiently ready to speak evil. It did not increase the scorching passion of her shame—but it deepened her repentance.

"Is Miss Ross in, Duncan?" she asked as she entered Merkland.

"Ou ay, Miss Falconer, Miss Anne's in," said Duncan, preceding her leisurely to Mrs. Ross's parlour. "She's in her ain room, according to her ain fashion. There's nae accounting for the whigmaleeries of you leddies, but an she disna live liker a human creature and less like a bird, ye may tak my word for't she'll no live ony way lang."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Marjory. "Is Miss Ross ill?"

"Na. I'm no saying she's ill," was the cautious answer; "but taking lang flights her lane, up the water and down the water, and when she comes in eating a nip that wadna ser

a lintie, and syne away up the stair to pingle her lane at a seam; I say it's a clear tempting o' Providence, Miss Falconer, and I have tell't Miss Anne that mysel."

Marjory ran up stairs, and tapped at the door of Anne's room. "Come in," said Anne. Marjory entered.

The window was open—the full glory of the setting sun was pouring over the beautiful country, lying like a veil of golden tissue, sobered with fairy tints of gray and purple upon the far-off solemn hills, and gleaming in the river as you could trace its course for miles, where its thick fringe of foliage was parted here and there. Anne leant upon the window-sill, looking out. It was not the fair heights and hollows of her native district that she saw; her eyes were veiled to these. The dim shores of the Forth in the still evening-time—the long, low, sighing of the waters—the desolate, gloomy house behind—the tall, gaunt figure stealing shadow-like over the glistening sand—these were before her constantly, in dream and vision, shutting out with their gray tints and sad colouring all other landscapes, how fair soever they might be.

She did not look up when Marjory entered, but waited to be addressed, thinking it May or Barbara. At last, finding the new-comer did not speak, she turned round.

"Marjory, is that you?"

"What are you thinking of, Anne?" said Marjory. "What makes you dream and brood thus? There you have been gazing out these two minutes, as fixedly as if you saw something of the greatest interest. I am quite sure you don't know what you are looking at, and, had I come forward suddenly, and asked you what river that was, you would have faltered and deliberated before you could be certain it was the Oran. I know you would. What is it all about?"

Anne smiled.

"It is not so easy to tell. You put comprehensive questions, Marjory."

"And here are you making yourself ill!" exclaimed Marjory, impetuously; "dreaming over something which no one is to know; walking alone, and sitting alone, and defrauding yourself of proper rest and relaxation, and, altogether, as plainly as possible endeavouring to manufacture a consumption. I say, Anne

Ross, what is it all about? I have a right to know—we all have a right to know; you don't belong to yourself. If you were not Anne Ross, of Merkland, I should begin to suspect we had some love-sickness on our hands."

"And if you were any one else but Marjory Falconer, of Falcon's Craig, I should be very angry," said Anne, smiling.

"Never anything reasonable from you since you came home; never a call upon any one but Mrs. Melder. Nothing but patient looks, and paleness, and reveries! I don't see why we should submit to it, Anne Ross. I protest, in the name of the parish—it is a public injustice!"

"Very well, Marjory," said Anne. "Pray be so good as sit down now, and do not scold so bitterly. Did you come all the way from Falcan's Craig for the sole purpose of bringing me under discipline?"

Marjory Falconer put up her hands to her cheeks to hide the vehement blushes which rushed back again; then, as she recalled the story she had come to tell, its ludicrous points overcame the shame, and she laughed with cha-

racteristic heartiness. There was not, after all, so very much to be ashamed of; but, as everybody exaggerated the extravagance of everything done by Marjory Falconer, so Marjory Falconer felt herself bitterly humiliated in the recollection of *escapades* which young ladies of much greater pretensions would only have laughed at.

"What is it, Marjory?" said Anne.

The fit of shame returned.

"Oh! not much. Only I have been making a fool of myself again."

Anne expressed no wonder; she only drew her friend into a chair, and asked:

"How?"

"I am going to tell you. I came here at once, you see, lest some one else should be before me with the news. Ah! and there you sit as cool and calm as though I were not entering my purgatory!"

"I don't want to tease you further," said Anne, "or I should say that when people make purgatories for themselves, it behoves them to endure patiently."

"Very well: you don't intend to be sympa-

thetic. I am quite satisfied. Now for my confession. Most unwittingly and innocently, I premise, was I led into the snare. Anne Ross! turn away from the window, and keep your glances within proper bounds. If your eyes wander so, I shall forget my own foolishness in yours—and I don't choose that."

Anne obeyed, and Marjory told her story—sometimes overwhelmed with her own passionate humiliation, sometimes bursting into irrepressible mirth. It was very soon told. Anne looked annoyed and vexed. She did not speak. It was the sorest condemnation she could have given.

"You have nothing to say to me!" exclaimed Marjory, the hot flood burning over her cheek, and neck, and forehead. "You think I am clearly hopeless now. You think—"

"I think," said Anne, "that Marjory Falconer, whom malicious people blame for pride, is not half proud enough."

"Not proud enough!"

It was difficult to believe, indeed, when one saw the drawing-up of her tall, fine figure, and the flashing of her eye.

"Yes, I understand. You would be proud enough were you Ralph; then, for everything brave, and honourable, and true, the fame of the Falconers would be safe in your hands: but you are not proud enough, being Marjory. I fancy we should inhabit a loftier atmosphere than these boyish frolics could find breath in, Marjory; an atmosphere too pure and rare to carry clamorous voices, whatever may be their burden."

"Gentle and mild," said Marjory, attempting a laugh, which would not come; "perfumed and dainty. I am no exotic, Anne; I must breathe living air. I cannot breathe odours."

Anne rose, and lifted her Bible from the table.

"The sublime of mild and gentle belongs to One greater than us; but I don't want to compel you to these. Look here, Marjory."

Marjory looked—read.

"'Strength and honour are her clothing,'" and bowed her head, in token of being vanquished.

"You have nothing to oppose to my argument," said Anne, smiling. "You are obliged

to yield without a word. Let me convince you, Marjory, that we stoop mightily from our just position, when we condescend to meddle with such humiliating follies as the rights of women —that we do compromise our becoming dignity when we involve ourselves in a discreditable warfare, every step in advance of which is a further humiliation to us. I forgive you your share in this exploit with all my heart. I am not sorry the man is punished, though I would rather you had not been connected with his punishment. It is not very much, after all; but I do declare war against these polemics of yours—all and several. I would have you more thoroughly woman-proud: it is by no means inconsistent with the truest humility. I would have you like this portrait; men do not paint in such vigorous colours now. Strength and honour, Marjory; household strength, and loftiness, and purity—better things than any imaginary rights that clamour themselves into mere words."

Marjory was half angry, half smiling.

"Very gentle, and calm, and proper, for an example to me; and so nobody does us any injus-

tice—nobody oppresses us? Very well: but I did not know it before."

"Nay," said Anne, playfully; "that is not what I said. But:

> "'The good old rule
> Sufficeth me, the simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.'"

"Anne!"

"I am quite serious. There are few amongst us who are ruled more than we need to be, Marjory. The best mind will always assert itself, in whomsoever it may dwell—we are safe in that. The weak ought to be controlled and guided, and will be, wherever there is a stronger, whether man or woman."

"Strange doctrines, these!" said Marjory Falconer. "I acknowledge myself outdone. I give up my poor little innovations. Why, Anne Ross, what would the proper people say? What would the Coulters—the Fergussons—the whole parish?"

"Perfectly agree with me," said Anne, "when it had time to think about it, without

being shocked in the least. The proper people! You forget that I am a very proper person myself."

"So I did," said Marjory Falconer, shrugging her shoulders, "so I did. Patronised by Mrs. Bairnsfather, highly approved by Mrs. Coulter and Mrs. Fergusson—I almost thought, just now, that you were as improper as myself."

CHAPTER II.

"Oh! crowned monarch of those miseries,
That have in human hearts their populous kingdom.
Thou feverish, restless, wakeful potency!
With all thy train of miserable hopes
And fears, that thrill the strings of this sad harp
With anguish for its music!
Wild starts of pain are thine anxiety!
And steadfast vigils of long suffering—hours
Which the soul trembles to look back upon."

THE summer had reached its height—the fervent month of July was waning, and Anne Ross's cheek growing paler every day. Very hard to bear this time of waiting was, harder than any toil or labour, more utterly exhausting than any weight of care and sorrow, which had

opportunity and means of working! She hardly ventured to speak of returning to Aberford, for Mrs. Ross's peevishness at the merest hint of such a wish, and the impatience of Lewis, were perfectly natural, she acknowledged. Her former journey, undertaken in opposition to their opinion, had produced nothing; she could not expect that they would readily yield to her again.

In the meantime tidings had come from Archibald Sutherland. He had reached his destination safely, and, under circumstances much more favourable than he could have hoped, had commenced his work. He had been able to render some especial service, the nature of which he did not specify, to his employer's only son, a very fine lad of fourteen or fifteen, which within a few days of his arrival brought him into Mr. Sinclair's house on the footing of a friend. Mr. Sinclair himself was, as common report said, a man of great enterprise in business, and notable perseverance, whose fortune was the work of his own hands; and blending with this, Archibald found a singular delicacy of tone and sentiment which

pleased him greatly. A man of strong mould, whose "stalk of carle hemp," was invested with rare intellectual grace and refinement—a household which, under the fervent skies of that strange Western World, remained still a Scottish household, looking back with the utmost love and tenderness to its own country and home—in the atmosphere of these, the broken laird found himself not long a stranger.

Mr. Sinclair had some knowledge of the North country—had heard of Archibald's family, and on some long past occasion, had seen Mrs. Catherine. This was an additional bond. The family of the merchant lived a very quiet life in a country house in the vicinity of the town, having scarcely any visitors: Archibald Sutherland, with his attainments and abilities, was an acquisition to them.

His prospects were pleasant; they brightened the inner room at the Tower, and shed a ray of light even upon Anne's reveries. Something more was needed, however, to shake off the lethargic sadness that began to overpower her. Mrs. Catherine applied the remedy.

Upon a drowsy July afternoon, when one

could fancy the earth, with her flushed cheek and loose robes, lying in that languid dreamy state, half way between asleep and awake, which in Scotland we call "dovering," Mrs. Catherine in her rustling silken garments, went stately down under the shadow of the trees, to Merkland. It was a very unusual honour. Mrs. Catherine was wont to receive visits, not to pay them.

Anne went to the gate to receive her. Lewis who, with characteristic prudence, had already begun to devote himself to the careful managing of his lands, put away the papers that lay before him, and left the library with much wonder, to ascertain Mrs. Catherine's errand. Mrs. Ross rose very peevishly from the sofa on which she had been for the last hour enjoying her usual sleep. It was enough to make any one ill-humoured to be disturbed so unexpectedly.

"Now, Madam," said Mrs. Catherine, when Mrs. Ross had greeted her with great ceremony and politeness, "you may ken I have come for a special purpose; I am going to Edinburgh."

"To Edinburgh!" exclaimed Mrs. Ross; "*you*, Mrs. Catherine. How shall we manage to get on at all without you?"

"Ye will fend in some manner doubtless," said Mrs. Catherine, drily.

"*I* may, perhaps, for I am a great housekeeper; but for Anne and Lewis, nothing goes right if a week passes without two or three visits to the Tower."

"Ay, Lewis, is it so?" said Mrs. Catherine. "I thought not I had keeped the power, now that I am past threescore, of drawing to my dwelling callants of your years."

"I have not been at the Tower for a month," said Lewis, bluntly; "I mean I have been very much occupied."

"As ye should be," said Mrs. Catherine. "I am not seeking excuses, Lewis; I am but blythe that it is not my memory that is failing me—seeing I should like ill to suffer loss in that particular, till this world's affairs are out of my hands—be careful of your lawful business, Lewis, as becomes your years. If ye were a good bairn, I might maybe do my endeavour to bring folk back with me, that

your leisure would be better wared upon: in the meantime, I have a suit to your mother."

Mrs. Ross looked astonished.

"To me?"

"Yes; this bairn Gowan, Mrs. Ross, as ye see, has been misbehaving herself. My ain gray cheek, withered as it is, has stronger health upon it than is on her young one. I have a doctor of physic among my serving women; I see no reason why I should not undertake to work cures as well as my neighbours—send her with me—I will bring her back free of her trouble."

"Oh, I beg you will not refer to me," said Mrs. Ross, angrily. "Anne is quite able to judge for herself."

"I beg your pardon, Madam. I say this bairn Gowan has no call to judge for herself. Is it your pleasure that I should try my skill? I came to make my petition to you, and not to Gowan."

"She is an excessively unreasonable girl," said Mrs. Ross, tossing her head; "if you know how to manage her, it is more than I do. I assure you, Mrs. Catherine, Anne's conduct to

me is of the most undutiful kind. She is a very foolish, unreasonable girl."

Poor Anne had been labouring these three or four weeks to please her stepmother, as assiduously as any fagged governess or sempstress in the land. The honourable scars of the needle had furrowed her finger; she had been labouring almost as hardly, and to much better purpose than the greater portion of those "needlewomen, distressed or otherways," whose miserable work done for miserable wages attracts so much sympathy and benevolent exertion in these days. She was somewhat astonished at the undeserved accusation. If she did wander for long miles along the course of the Oran, it was in the dewy morning, before Mrs. Ross had left her room. If she did brood over her secret hope and sorrow, it was when Mrs. Ross was sullen or asleep. She said nothing in self-defence, but felt the injustice keenly, notwithstanding.

"That is what I am saying," said Mrs. Catherine. "She has been misbehaving herself, and we have tholed her dwining in silence. So far as I can see, it is high time to take note

of it now; therefore my petition is, that ye suffer her to go with me. It is not my wont to pass over ill-doing; let me have the guiding of her for a while."

"I think you ought to take advantage of Mrs. Catherine's invitation, Anne," said Lewis. "You do not look well."

Mrs. Ross tossed her head in silence.

"Truly, Gowan," said Mrs. Catherine, "I have worn out of the way of asking favours; maybe it is want of use that makes me prosper so ill. Am I to get your daughter, Mrs. Ross, for company on my travel, or am I no? I must pray ye to let me have your answer."

"Oh, if you choose to take her, and if Anne chooses to go, my consent is of little consequence," said Mrs. Ross: then softening her tone a little, she added, "I have no objection; unfortunately Anne is not of sufficient importance in the household, Mrs. Catherine, to make us feel the want of her greatly. Certainly I have no objection—she can go."

A harsh reply rose to Mrs. Catherine's lips; but for Anne's sake, she suppressed it—the permission, ungracious as it was, was accepted,

and Mrs. Catherine made arrangements with Anne for their journey; she had settled that they should leave the Tower that week.

Mrs. Catherine travelled in her own carriage. She had an old house, grand and solitary, in an old quarter of Edinburgh, whose antique furniture and lofty rooms strangers came to see, as one of the lesser wonders of the city, which boasts so many. Mrs. Catherine's horses were proceeding at a good pace along the southward road, within sight of a dazzling sea, and very near the dark high cliffs, and scattered fisher villages which formed its margin. Johnnie Halflin sat beside the coachman. Jacky Morison and her grandmother were behind. Mrs. Catherine within was explaining her plans to Anne.

"It is my purpose, Gowan, to set ye to your labour again; I see there is neither health nor peace for ye until ye have got some better inkling of this matter. Am I no right?"

"Perfectly," said Anne. "I cannot rest, indeed. I shall be of little use to any one, until some light is thrown on this."

"Then, Gowan, it is my meaning to dwell in

my own house in Edinburgh, where ye can find me, if I am needed. I cannot be in the house of a stranger, or I would have gone with ye. I am not ill-pleased that this necessity has come, for there are divers in Edinburgh, that it is meet I should say farewell to, before I depart to my rest. Forbye this, Gowan, there is another cloud rising upon the sky of that ill-trysted house of Sutherland."

Anne started.

"Archibald is well—is there any further intelligence, Mrs. Catherine?"

"Archie's sister is not well, Gowan. Did I not tell you that her fuil of a man was dead?"

"No, I never heard it before."

"I meant to tell you—it has passed from my mind, in the thought of the travel. He has been killed—how, or for what reason, I have not asked. I have written to Isabel Sutherland to come home. I cannot trust her without natural guard or helper, her lane in the midst of strangers. She is a light-headed, vain, undutiful girl—I ken her of old—and farther shame must not come upon the house, Gowan, if it is in my power to ward it off. If she will not

come, I have made up my mind—I will go, and bring her home."

"Go!" exclaimed Anne. "To England?—you are not able for the journey."

"Hold your peace, Gowan! I am able for whatever is needful, as every mortal is, that has a right will to try. It's my hope Archie Sutherland is in a fair way of recovering his good fame and healthful spirit. If Isabel is in peril, it is deadly and beyond remeid—for the sake of the fuil herself (she bears Isabel Balfour's name and outward resemblance), and for the sake of Archie, I am bound to do my endeavour, if it should be by the strong hand. Gowan, ye may think me distrustful beyond what is needed. Maybe I am. She left her mother's sick-bed for the sake of a strange man. Syne when he was sent to a solitary place, she left him, also, for the sake of vanities. If ye had done the like, I would have distrusted you."

Anne could not realize the cause of distrust. She deprecated, and thought Mrs. Catherine's fears uncalled for — shrinking from the idea of danger to Isabel, almost as she would have done from any suspicion of herself.

When she had seen Mrs. Catherine settled comfortably in her spacious and grand Edinburgh lodging, and the bustle of arrival fairly over, Anne, with her attendant Jacky, proceeded to Aberford.

Miss Crankie and Mrs. Yammer were at tea. Their energetic little servant ushered Anne into the small parlour, looking out upon the green, in which they usually sat. They had blue cups and saucers of the venerable willow pattern, arranged above the red and yellow lady on the tray—a teapot, belonging to the same set, with a lid, the sole relic of a broken black one—a comfortable plate of tolerably thick bread-and-butter, and two or three saucers, containing various specimens of jellies. Mrs. Yammer sat languidly in a great, old elbow-chair. Miss Crankie was perched upon a low seat before the tray, making tea.

Anne's entrance caused a commotion. There were a great many apologies, and expressions of wonder and pleasure at seeing her again; and then she was begged to take a seat, and a cup of tea. Anne sat down, and kindly looked out at the window, while Miss Crankie abstracted

the lid from the teapot, and, from the depths of an adjoining cupboard, produced another one, more resembling it in colour.

"Ye see," said Miss Crankie, nodding her wiry little curls at the ruddy-coloured compounds in the saucers, "we've been making our jelly, and were just trying it. I can recommend the rasps, Miss Ross—the red currants would take a thought mair boiling, and the gooseberries are drumlie—but I can recommend the rasps."

"If Miss Ross is no feared for her teeth," sighed Mrs. Yammer. "I got cauld mysel on Sabbath at the Kirk, and was trying the jam for my throat. I'm a puir weak creature, Miss Ross: the wind gangs through me like a knife."

"I have returned to you for accommodation, Miss Crankie," said Anne. "Are the rooms unoccupied now?"

"Eh, bless me! isna that an uncommon providence," exclaimed Miss Crankie. "Mrs. Mavis is gaun away the morn!"

"But what can you do with me to-night?" said Anne.

"Oh, nae fear o' us—we'll do grand," said

Miss Crankie. "I'm blyth ye're come back, Miss Ross, and yet I'm sorry to see you so shilpit. Ye'll find the sea-air do ye mair guid noo. Ye're no looking half sae well as ye did when ye gaed away."

"Ah! Miss Ross," said Mrs. Yammer, dolorously, "I hope ye'll use the means and get right advice in time. Ye'll be fashed wi' a pain in your side? For mysel, it's little use saying what I have to thole—there's scarce an hour in the day, that I havna stitches through and through me."

"Hout, Tammie, ye're aye meat-hale," responded her brisker sister. "Ye've come at a better season now, Miss Ross, the haill town is full of sea-bathers. I was saying to auld Marget, that she might win a pound or twa for her ain hand, with letting some o' thae muckle rooms, in Schole, and naebody, be the waur—it's sae handy for the sea—if Kirstin Lillie and her brother, hadna come hame sae suddenly."

"They are at home, then?" said Anne.

"Oh, ay! they came hame about a month ago, in as great a hurry as they gaed away;

ane scarce ever sees them noo, even on the sands—they're strange folk."

The next day, young Mrs. Mavis and her two blooming children left their sea-side lodgings, and Anne took peaceful possession of her former rooms. The tall gaunt outline of Schole, as it stood out against the deep blue of the evening sky, dismal and forlorn as it was, looked like a friend; but though she lingered about its vicinity all the night, and watched eagerly within sight of its little gate, no one ventured forth. The low projecting window had light within it, but it was curtained carefully. She could see no trace of Christian. Why did they avoid her? why was there so much additional secrecy and seclusion?

The second day after their arrival in Aberford, Jacky had a visitor. It was little Bessie, Alice Aytoun's maid. Bessie was living with an aunt, the wife of a forester, whose house was within three or four miles of Aberford. Jacky, by Anne's permission, returned with her to spend the afternoon in the aunt's house.

The two girls set out very jubilant, and in high

spirits, with much laughing mention of Johnnie Halflin, whom Bessie had already seen in Edinburgh, and from whom she had received a very grandiloquent account of the chastisement of Mr. Fitzherbert, and of the mighty things which the said Johnnie would have done, had not Miss Falconer put her *veto* on his valour.

The forester's house was in the bosom of the wood under his charge. A narrow foot-road, winding through the trees, ran close to the bounding hedge of its well-stocked garden, and nestling warmly below the thick foliage, the house stood snug in the corner of its luxuriant enclosure, presiding in modest pride, like some sober cottage matron, conscious of decent comfort and independence, over its flourishing cabbages, and stately bushes of southernwood, ripe gooseberries, and abounding roses. Within, it was as clean and bright as forest cottage could be, and with its long vistas of noble trees everywhere, and the one thread of communication with the outer world that ran close to its door, was a pleasant habitation—homelike and cheerful. Bessie's aunt was, like her cottage, soberly light-hearted,

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kind and motherly. Upon her well-scoured white deal table, she had set out a row of glancing cups and saucers, flanked with delicate bannocks of various kinds, and jelly more plentiful than Miss Crankie's. It was early in the afternoon. Mrs. Young, honest woman, hospitably purposed entertaining her guests with a magnificent tea before her husband and stalwart sons came in to their ruder and more substantial meal. She gave her niece's friend a hearty welcome; the two girls, after their dusty walk of four miles, by no means thought the kindly auntie's preparations unseasonable; but after Mrs. Young had turned a deaf ear to two or three hints from Bessie, she explained her delay at last.

"Ye see, lassies, there's an auld neighbour coming this gate this afternoon. Her and me served in one place before I was married, and she's been lang in a gentleman's house, south—near Berwick. She's an auld lass; a thrifty weel-doing carefu' woman, wi' a guid wage, and siller to the fore; but she's come to years when folk are lone, if they have nae near friends, and Rob Miller, her brither, has a housefu' o'

weans; and I'm no sure that his wife can be fashed fyking about a pernickity single woman. So ye maun see and be ceevil, and take note o' Jean—how weel put on and wise-like she is—and tak a pattern by her; it's a' her ain doing; she's been working for hersel a' her days."

Bessie drummed upon the table—looked at the tea "masking" before the fire, the smooth, well-baked bannocks, and beautiful red currant jelly upon the table—and became impatient.

"I wish she would come then, auntie. It's awfu' stourie on the road."

"Yonder's somebody in among the trees," said Jacky, glancing out.

It was Mrs. Young's friend at last, and the good woman bestirred herself to complete her table arrangements, while Bessie conveyed the mighty Leghorn bonnet and wonderful Paisley shawl, which Rob Miller's eldest daughter already looked forward to as a great inheritance, into the inner room. Mrs. Young's friend was a tall, bony, erect woman, with a thin brown face, and projecting teeth, and sandy hair care-

fully smoothed beneath a muslin cap, modestly tied with a scrap of blue ribbon. She was a very homely, unhandsome-looking person, yet had an unassuming simplicity about her, not common in the upper servant class. Jean Miller had known evil in her day. The long upper lip pressing above these irregular ill-shaped teeth of her's had quivered with deep griefs many times in the painful and weary past years, which had left no record of themselves or of her course in them, save that most deeply pathetic one engraven in her own solitary high heart—a high heart it was, humble and of slight regard as was the frame it dwelt in—much stricken, sorely tried, and with an arrow quivering in it still.

Jean's hands were rigidly crossed in her lap; she was never quite at ease in idleness. Mrs. Young good-humouredly drew her chair to the table, called Bessie, placed the teapot on the tray, and began her duties. There was a simple blessing asked upon the "offered mercies," according to the reverent usage of peasant families in Scotland, and then the dainties were discussed.

"And how is Andrew winning on wi' his learning, Jean?" said Mrs. Young.

There was a slight quivering of the thin upper lip—very slight—no eye less keen than Jacky's could have perceived it.

"They tell me very weel," said Jean, meekly; "he's been getting some grand books in a prize, and they're unco weel pleased wi' him at the college."

"He's a clever lad," said Mrs. Young.

"Ay, I'll no say but he's a lad of pairts," said Jean, "if he but makes a right use o' them."

"Ay," said Mrs. Young, sympathetically, "they're no ower guid company for that, thae young doctor-lads. Eh, keep me! Jean woman, if this callant was taking to ill courses like his faither, ye wad never haud up your head again."

Jean's lip quivered again—more visibly this time—the discipline of her self-denying life had been a stern one. The prodigal of her family, the gayest, handsomest, and cleverest of them all, a good workman, and an idle one, had hung upon her, a heavy, painful

burden, falling step by step in the ruinous downward course of reckless dissipation, until he ended his days at last, shorn of all the gaiety and cleverness which had thrown a veil at first upon his sin — an imbecile, drivelling drunkard. With mighty anguish, which few comprehended or could sympathize with, she had prayed, entreated, remonstrated, forgiven, and supported him through all his sad career. He left an orphan boy on her hands. With the tenderest mother-anxiety, Jean Miller had brought up this child—with genuine mother-ambition, had, at the cost of long labour, and much self-denying firmness on her own part, sent him to college when he reached proper years, eager to raise him above the fear of that terrible stain and sin which had destroyed the first Andrew — her once gay and clever brother. But of late insidious voices had whispered in her ear that the second Andrew had taken the first step in that descending course. In agony unspeakable, the youth's watchful guardian hastened to Edinburgh to ascertain the truth of this. She found it false; there was yet no appearance of any budding evil, but her heart,

falling back upon its sad experience, sank within her, prophetic of evil. She said nothing in return to the ill-advised sympathy of Mrs. Young—her lip quivered—it was more eloquent than words.

"Your're new to this country, I'm thinking?" she said, addressing Jacky.

"Yes," said Jacky, bashfully.

"She's frae the north country," said Mrs. Young. "Ye've been lang out o' this pairt yoursel, Jean."

"Ay," was the answer, "it's eighteen year past the twenty-first o' June—I mind the day weel."

"That would be about the time the gentleman was killed," said Mrs. Young.

"Yes," said Jean; "the very morning. I'll ne'er forget it."

"Eh, auntie!" exclaimed Bessie. "Whatna gentleman?"

Jacky did not speak, but her thin, angular frame thrilled nervously, and she fixed her keen eyes upon Jean.

"Deed a gentleman ye've heard o' often enough, Bessie," said her aunt. "Miss Alice's

father — ye've heard your mother telling the story about Mr. Aytoun mony a time, nae doubt. Ye see, Jean, my sister was Mrs. Aytoun's right-hand woman. I dinna ken how the puir lady would have won through her trouble ava, when Miss Alice was born, if it hadna been for our Bell—no that he was ower guid a man, if a' tales were true, but nae doubt it was an awfu' dispensation. Ane forgets ill and wrang when the doer o't's taen away—and a violent death like that!"

"Weel," said Jean Miller, "a'body's dear to their ain. But he wasna muckle worth the mourning for."

"And how was he killed?" asked Jacky, with some trepidation.

"Anither gentleman—a fine, cheery, kindly lad as ye could see—shot him wi' a gun. It was an awfu' disgrace to the parish, as weel as a great crime; but, sae far as I could hear, the folk were mair wae for young Redheugh than they were for Mr. Aytoun."

"And were they sure he did it?" asked Jacky, breathlessly.

"Sure! Lassie, what could be surer? They

found his gun, wi' his name on't, and they saw him himsel leaving the wood; and unco easy he had ta'en it, as the folk say, for he was gaun whistling and singing at a fule sang, and the man's bluid on his hand."

"If *he* took it easy, it's mair than his friends did," said Jean Miller, significantly.

"I never heard tell of ony friends he had in this part," said the matter-of-fact Mrs. Young. "He was nephew to the auld family, and no son. I mind hearing ance that he was frae some place away in the Hielands—but maybe that was a' lees."

"But maybe you werena meaning a relation?" adventured Jacky, addressing Jean.

"Na, lassie, it was nae relation. I ken naething about his kin: it was a friend—ane that was uncommon chief wi' him. He was a student lad at that time, that had served his time to be a doctor, like my ain nephew Andrew, only he was done wi' the college; and if ever mortal man was out o' his mind wi' trouble and fricht, and sore grief for an unhappy reprobate, it was that lad, the morning o' the murder."

"Did you see him?" exclaimed Jacky, anxiously.

"Ay, lass, I saw him. I was gaun hame that very day to my place that I'm in yet—I've been eighteen year past wi' the same mistress—and it happened I was by that waterside between eight and nine in the morning. I was but a young lass then, and I had a reason for't—it's nae matter now what it was. I was coming round the howe o' the brae where the road turns aff to the Milton, when I met that lad. That white apron had mair a life-like colour than he had on his face; but, for a' that, he was wiping his brow for heat. The look of him was like the look of a man that had the bluid standing still in his veins. He neither saw me, nor the road he was gaun on, but just dashed on right before him, as if naething could stop him in the race. Ye may tak my word, it's nae little grief like what men ca' sympathy or pity, that could pit a man into a blind madness like that. I ken mair about it noo than I did then."

"Woman—Jean!" exclaimed Mrs. Young;

"what for did ye no come forrit at the time—it might have helped the proof? Losh! would the tane be helping the tither? would there be twa o' them at the misfortunate man?"

"Na; he was an innocent, pithless callant, that Maister Patrick," said Jean. "*He* could have nae hand in't. A' that day I couldna get his face out o' my mind; but I had mony things to trouble me, sorting at my mother, and putting things right for Andrew—he was doing weel then, puir man!—and getting my ain kist ready for my journey, and I gaed away early in the day, and so I didna hear o' the murder. And my mother was nae hand at the writing, and Andrew, puir man, was aye a thocht careless, and I never saw ane belanging to my ain place, to tell me the news. So a' the trying that there was, was dune, and poor young Redheugh was lying at the bottom of the sea, before I ever heard tell o't—but I've aye minded sinsyne Maister Patrick Lillie's awfu' face—I've had a kindness for him frae that day, for of a' the sair troubles in this world, I ken nane, like murning ower a sinner that ye canna mend, and yet that ye would gie your

ain life for, as blythe as ever ye gaed to your rest. I ken what it is—and sure am I, that if ever there was a man distracted with the crime o' anither, it was Maister Patrick Lillie, for young Redheugh."

"And was Redheugh an ill man?" said Jacky, in a half whisper.

"I never heard an ill word o' him till then. He was as weel likit as a man could be—and a kinder heart to puir folk there wasna in the countryside."

"And that's true," said Mrs. Young. "Ye should take it to yoursels, lassies—you that are young, and havena got the rule o' your ain spirits. There was a fine young gentleman, ye see, wi' routh o' a' thing, as grand as heart could desire, and yet he tint baith life and name, in this world and the next, a' for an evil anger in his heart. It's an awfu' warning—it's our pairt to improve it for our ain edification."

"And what for was the gentleman angry at Mr. Aytoun?" asked Bessie.

"Oh! the adversary has aye plenty spunks to light that fire wi'. Some folk say yae thing,

and some anither. I've heard it was for speaking lightly of a young lady that was troth-plighted to Redheugh."

"And what for did he no fecht him, the way folk fecht in books?" said Bessie.

"Nae doubt because the enemy thought he had fa'en on an easier plan of putting an end to them baith. Nae mortal in this world, let alane a bit lassie like you, can faddom the wiles o' the auld serpent, or the weakness o' folk's ain treacherous hearts. It's no what folk should do, to be making a wark about a criminal like that, that shed blood wi' a wilful hand—but there was mony a heart in the parish wae for Redheugh."

"And him that ye saw coming out of the wood?" said Jacky, tremulously, turning to Jean Miller again: "how would he ken?"

"I canna tell," said Jean. "It was my thought he had met Redheugh, or seen him, when the deed was new done—and it stunned the very soul within him, so that he scarce kent in his extremity what it was, that was pitting him distracted. I was asking Rob's wife about him last night: she says

his sister and him are living their lane in an unco quiet way. Puir lad!—but he'll be a man of years now."

"And ye didna speak to him?" said Jacky.

"Speak to him! Lassie, if ye havena a lighter weird than ither folk, ye'll ken before lang, that sore trouble is not to be spoken to. I wad rather gang into a king's chamber unbidden, than put mysel forrit, when I wasna needed, into the heavy presence of grief."

"For grief is a king, too," murmured Jacky.

"And so it is," said Jean Miller, with another emphatic quiver of her lip—the little narrow Edinburgh attic, in which her student nephew toiled, or ought to toil, rising before her eyes, and her heart yearning over him in unutterable agonies of tenderness—"and so it is—and kenning that there's sin in ane ye like weel, or fearing that there's sin, in ane whose purity is the last hope o' your heart, that's the king o' a' griefs. But, mind, ye mauna say a word of this ower again. I never tell't onybody before now, and I would like ill to add a trouble to a sair heart. Mind, ye mauna mention this again."

"Yonder's my uncle!" exclaimed Bessie, whom this grave episode had wearied mightily, "and Jamie, and Michael, and Tam. We've twa good hours yet, Jacky, before ye need to gang hame, and Miss Anne winna be angry if you're a thocht late. We'll gang and let ye see the Fairy Well—it's at the ither end o' the wood. Eh, woman, ye dinna ken how bonnie it is!"

But Jacky had no heart for the Fairy Well, or the rude gallantry of Tam, and Michael, and Jamie. She was too full of the great intelligence she had gathered for her mistress. She drew her own conclusions, quickly enough, if not very clearly, but she saw at once that Anne would think it of the highest importance. How she knew so much we cannot tell—she could not have told herself. These electric thrills of intuition, which put the elf into possession of the most secret and guarded desires and wishes of her superiors, were as much a mystery to herself as to others. There were various mysteries about her—not the least of these being the reason why the spirit of a knight errant, of as delicate honour, and heroic

devotion, as ever adorned the brightest age of chivalry, should have been endued with the singular, and by no means elegantly formed garment, of this girl's dark elfin frame and humble place.

So Jacky with much weariness, physical and mental, endured the visit to the Fairy Well; and then under the safe conduct of Tam, Mrs. Young's youngest son, and "convoyed" half way by Bessie and Michael, returned to Aberford. The night had fallen before she reached Miss Crankie's house. Anne, newly returned from a long and ineffectual survey of Schole, had passively submitted to have candles placed upon her table by Miss Crankie's servant. She still sat by the window, however, looking out upon that centre of mysterious interest. It was perfectly still—only a faint reflection of light upon the dark water told of a watcher in the high chamber of the desolate house.

Jacky entered, and Anne turned to ask her kindly how she had enjoyed her visit. "I dinna ken, Miss Anne," said Jacky, "but if ye please—"

"What, Jacky?"

"Would ye let me draw down the blind, and put in your chair to the table, because I've something to tell you, Miss Anne."

Anne consented immediately. The room looked, as dusky parlours will look by faint candle-light in the evenings of bright summer days, very dull and forlorn and melancholy. Anne seated herself smiling by the table; she expected some chronicle of little Bessie's kindred, or at the utmost some confession of petty ill-doing, which burdened Jacky's conscience. Jacky's conscience was exceedingly tender; she did make such confessions sometimes.

"If ye please, Miss Anne," began Jacky earnestly, "Bessie's aunt kens Jean Miller."

"And who is Jean Miller, Jacky?" said Anne, smiling.

"And if ye please, Miss Anne, Jean Miller was in the wood by the waterside, at the brae, where the road goes to the Milton farm, eighteen years ago, on the twenty first of June."

It was Anne's turn to start, and look up

anxiously now. Jacky went on in the firm steadiness of strong excitement.

"And if ye please, Miss Anne, she saw a man; and it wasna Mr. —— it wasna the gentleman they ca' young Redheugh—"

"Who was it, Jacky?"

"His face was whiter than white cloth, and he was like as if the blood was standing still in his veins, and he was running straight on, as if he neither saw the road nor who was looking at him; and as he ran, he wipit his brow, for a' that he was whiter than death."

Anne was walking through the room in burning agitation; she could not rest—now she came up to Jacky, as the girl made a pause for breath, and grasped her arm.

"Who was he, Jacky—who was he?"

"If ye please, Miss Anne, it was the gentleman at Schole. She called him Mr. Patrick Lillie."

Anne put her hands up to her head, dizzy and stunned; she felt like one who had received a mighty shock, and scarcely knew either the

instrument or the reality of it in the first extremity of its power. She did not say a word—she did not think—she sat down unconsciously on her chair, and pressed her hands to her head with some vague idea of crushing the dull indefinite pain out of it. Jacky stood beside her, pale, self-possessed, but trembling violently; the girl's excitement had reached a white heat—intensely strong and still.

Deadly light and deadly darkness struggling for hopeless mastery—a goal so nearly won, and yet so utterly removed. A long, low cry of pain came from Anne's parched lips; she had not strength or heart to inquire further; a fearful possibility came upon her now, which had never struck her mind before.

At length, when the violence of the first shock was moderated, she began again to question Jacky. Jean Miller's explanation of the haggard looks and wild bewilderment of Norman's friend composed, though it could not convince her. She must see him, this mysterious sufferer, must ascertain—standing before him face to face—what of this dark dread

might be true, and what false. It would not leave her: before she had been alone for ten minutes, the deadly bewilderment had returned, and what to do she knew not!

CHAPTER III.

"'Tis meet this brooding calm be broken,
Yonder gleams the fiery token,
With his train of cloudy forms,
Comes the bold Angel, named of storms.
Through the fevered stillness, see,
O'er the blind, bewildered sea,
Coward mists before him flee.
If his proud breath bring sometime sorrow,
Yet shall we bless his pains to-morrow."

THE next morning rose, dim, hot, and oppressive, suiting well, in its unnatural stillness and sultry brooding, with the terror of bewilderment and darkness which had fallen upon Anne. The tossings and wild restlessness of that mental fever, the gloomy clouds that had settled upon

the future, the sad significance with which Christian Lillie's words came burning back upon her memory—bore her down in dark blinding agony as those heavy thunder clouds bore down upon the earth. She wandered out:—with eyes keen for that one object, and veiled to all things else, she hovered about Schole. Once as she lingered by the hedge, she saw an upper window opened, and the pale head which she had seen once before, with its high snowy temples, and thin hair, and delicately lined face, looke out steadfastly upon the gloomy weltering water. The eyes were blue, deep, and liquid as a summer evening sky—the face, with all its tremulous poetry, and exquisite delicacy of feebleness, was gazing out with a mournful composure, which made its extreme susceptibility and fluctuating language of expression, more remarkable than ever. Calmly mournful as it then was, you could so well see how the lightest breath would agitate it—the faintest whisper sway and mould these delicate facile features. One long, steadfast sad look was thrown over the darkly silent water, and brooding ominous sky, and then the window was closed. Anne remained upon the

sands nearly the whole day—but saw nothing more of the mysterious inhabitants of Schole.

Wild whispers of wind curled along the dark Firth as the evening fell. All the day, the earth had been lying in that dread, bewildered pause which comes before a thunder storm. Now, as Anne sat looking out into the darkness, the tempest began; the night was very dark—the whole breadth of the sky was covered by one ponderous thunder-cloud, through which there suddenly shot a sheet of ghastly light. Anne was still at the window—she started back, but not before the scene revealed by that flash, had fixed itself in its terrific gloom and unearthly colours upon her memory. The dismal outline of the house of Schole—the sea beyond plunging and heaving in black wrath—and on its troubled and gloomy bosom, a drifting, helpless ship, the broken masts and rigging of which seemed for the moment flaming with wild, phosphoric light. Anne shrank from the window; but in a moment returned in intense anxiety, too thoroughly aroused and absorbed to think of fear.

Another flash, and yet another—and still the

helpless, dismantled ship was drifting on; she fancied she could see dark figures, specks in the distance, clinging to the yards; she fancied she could discern the black waves weltering over the buried hull, as the light fell full upon the vessel—there was a blind incompetency in its motions which showed that its crew had lost command of it. She saw the falling of some spar—she fancied she could hear a terrible shrill cry; she threw open her window. The thunder was pealing its awful trumpet-note into the dense darkness;—gazing eagerly through the gloom she waited for another flash.

"For guid sake come in—for pity's sake come in," cried Miss Crankie, pulling her from behind. The sisters, their maid, and Jacky had crowded together into Anne's room in the gregarious instinct of fear.

Bursting over the mighty gloom of waters flashed that death-like illumination. There *were* figures on the yards of the drifting ship—there were wild cries of sharp despair and anguish; you could fancy there were even agonized hands stretching out in vain for help, and there were —yes, there were also figures upon the sands.

"God preserve us!" exclaimed Miss Crankie in overwhelming awe and excitement as the flash shone over their faces. "Miss Ross for pity's sake come in."

Anne did come in—she snatched a shawl which hung upon a chair, and hurried blindly forward to the door.

"Where are ye gaun?" exclaimed Miss Crankie.

It was echoed in different tones by all the others, as they crowded together in awe and terror.

"To the sands—to the sands," said Anne: she made her way through them in spite of remonstrance and entreaty: she extricated herself from the detaining grasp of Miss Crankie, and leaving the house, ran hastily towards Schole.

It was a fearful night; the wind had risen imperceptibly from the wild whispers which crept over the Firth in the earlier evening to a shifting, coarse, impetuous gale. The lightning, as it burst in sheets over the earth, revealed strange glimpses of the shivering summer foliage and verdure, which bore so strange a contrast

to the storm raging above. Anne saw nothing but the black, weltering water—the helpless drifting ship—the deadly danger of some souls—the help that might be rendered them.

Before she reached Schole, Miss Crankie and Jacky overtook her—none of them spoke. All were agitated, excited, and anxious—all were looking eagerly towards the sea.

Another flash—the black waters were dashing high up on those feeble spars. Clinging to them in the wild vehemence of despair were several men, and one slight shadow bound as it seemed to the mast—could it be a woman in that extremity? The hull was covered—the waters appeared to rise higher every moment. There was a little knot of people on the sands—was there no help?

Again the deadly illumination bursts over sea and sky. There is a figure struggling through the surge—you catch a glimpse of him—now fighting through the foam—now buffeting with the black waves. Anne and her companions are already on the sands; they see a strong rope trailing over the wet shore—the other end is fastened round the body of this brave man.

The little knot on the shore are sternly silent—fearfully anxious. No one looks in the face of his neighbour—they are watching with intense, unswerving gaze, the progress of that adventurer across the gloomy water. Even Anne scarcely notes that the gates of Schole stand open, and that there are lights within!

They see him again further in, when the next flash comes, fighting vigorously through the waves; the dark figures on the yards of the helpless ship have ceased to cry—they too are watching (who can tell with what agonies of fear and hope?) the speck that fights towards them through the turbid gloom of that dark sea.

There is a long pause this time, between the lightning and its accompanying thunder. In the dense gloom they can discover nothing of his progress. They wait in intense anxiety for the next flash.

The water is bathed in light again: he is returning. He carries an indistinct burden in one arm, guiding himself painfully as they can discern by the tightened rope. The men on

shore assist him warily—another long buffeting —another breathless watch, and he has reached solid land again.

Who is this man? Anne Ross's eyes are strained eagerly to discover. The light from a lantern streams on a woman carried in his arms; he did not wait to bring her fully to the land, but placing her in the hold of one of the lookers on, turned instantly back again—back through the gloomy, heaving, turbid water, to save more lives—to complete the work he had begun.

Anne watched him toiling back again through surge and foam, so anxiously that she scarcely noted the burden he had brought from the wreck in his arms. Now a faint cry recalled her attention; the saved woman was a young mother clasping an infant convulsively to her breast. Two or three female figures were already kneeling round her — Miss Crankie, Jacky, and another. Anne joined them; the third person was Christian Lillie.

They could scarcely draw the child from the strained arms that clasped it; it was alive—

nothing more. The agonized hold relaxed at last, and Miss Crankie received it from the mother.

"Let us take her in," said Christian Lillie raising the young woman in her arms.

She resisted feebly.

"No—no till they're a' safe; no till I see Willie."

Miss Crankie carried the child into Schole. Christian and Anne wrapped the young mother in a shawl, and supported her. Her limbs were rigid with the terrible vigil. She gazed in agony towards the ship, and murmured:

"He'll no leave it till the last; he'll no save himsel till a'body else is saved. Oh! the Lord keep him—Willie!—Willie!"

And there they remained till six heroic voyages had been made to the helpless vessel. They were all saved at last. The last, the husband of the young woman, and captain of the ship, fighting his own way to the shore; he had more strength or nerve than the rest.

And who had done it all? The light from the lanthorn streamed for a moment on his

face—that pale susceptible face, whose delicate features spoke so eloquently the language of expression — the thin hair clung to his white temples; his eyes were shining with unnatural excitement—with something which looked like an unnatural vehemence of hope. It was Patrick Lillie!

The bystanders and the saved men alike poured into Schole; they were all assembled in the large old-fashioned kitchen. Their deliverer had disappeared. Miss Crankie, alert and active, went about, briskly helping all. Christian was there, and Anne. Seven lives in all had been saved by Patrick Lillie. The young wife of the captain lay almost insensible in an easy chair; she had borne the extremity of danger bravely, but now she sank — the over-strained nerves gave way — she could hardly answer the inquiries of her husband.

By and by, under Christian's directions, he carried her to a small room upstairs, where a bed had been hastily prepared for her. Anne volunteered her attendance, and rendered it with all care and tenderness; she was left

alone with the young mother, Christian and the captain of the ill-fated vessel in the meantime arranging for the accommodation of the men.

The rigid limbs of Anne's patient relaxed at last ; the chill was gradually overcome, and about an hour after they had been brought within the sheltering walls of Schole, Anne received the infant from Miss Crankie to satisfy the eager mother. The strangers by this time were gone ; the shipwrecked men were accommodated as well as might be in the comfortable kitchen. Miss Crankie herself, when there remained nothing further to be done, departed also—only Anne continued with her patient—she had not seen either Patrick or Christian again.

Drawing the baby to her breast, the young mother soon fell into a refreshing sleep. Anne sat thoughtfully by her bed-side — now and then she heard a footstep below testifying that the household was still astir. She was anxious to remain as long as possible — to endeavour to open some communication with this singular brother and sister. For the moment she had forgotten Jean Miller's history, and shud-

dered and trembled as she remembered it—would they avoid her still?

The room she occupied had a faded red curtain drawn along the further wall; she fancied she heard a low murmur as of some voice beyond it, and rose to see. The wall was a very thin partition, which had evidently been put up in some emergency to make two rooms of one—immediately behind the curtain was a door standing ajar. Anne could see through into another room guarded like this by a curtain, placed there for some simple purpose of preventing a draft of air as it seemed, for each of the rooms had another door, and both entered from a gusty, windy gallery.

And there was a voice proceeding from that outer room — a solitary voice, low-toned, and strange — it was reading aloud as it seemed, although its owner was evidently alone, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Anne glanced back to see that her patient slept; she was lying in a calm slumber,

luxuriously peaceful, and at rest. The low voice went on:

"Not fourfold but sevenfold. Lord! Thou seest the offering in my hand. Thou who didst not reject this sinner of old times. Thou who didst tread wearily that way to Jericho for this publican's sake, who was a son of Abraham. Lord, Lord, rejectest Thou me?—seven for one—wherefore did I toil for them, but to lay them at Thy feet—seven saved for one lost. Oh, Thou blessed One, where are Thy tender mercies—Thy loving kindnesses—wilt Thou shut thy heaven only to me?"

There was a pause; the voice was broken and unsteady; the strange utterance passionate and solemn; it was resumed:

"Not thy heaven, unless it be Thy will—not Thy glory or Thy gladness — only Thy forgiveness, merciful Lord, only one uplifting of Thy reconciled countenance. There is no light. I grope in the noonday, like a blind man, I cannot see Thee—I cannot see Thee! Lord, I confess my iniquity before Thee. Lord, I restore Thee sevenfold. Look upon my offering—seven for one! I bring them to

Thy feet—seven saved for one lost! Lord of all tenderness—of all compassion, Thou most merciful—most mighty—is it I—is it I? Wilt Thou reject only me?"

Anne stood fixed in silent, eager interest—she could not think of any evil in her listening. She was too deeply moved—too mightily concerned for that!

"Thou knowest the past. Thou, who ordainest all things, dost know these fearful years. Blood for blood. Lord, thou hast seen mine agonies—Thou knowest how I have died a thousand times in this fearful, blighted life: look upon mine offering—I bring thee back sevenfold. Lord of mercy, cast me not away for evermore!"

The voice ceased. Anne cast a tremulous glance from the edge of the curtain. He was sitting by a table, a Bible lying open before him. Large drops hung upon his thin, high forehead—his delicate features were moving in silent agonies of entreaty—a hot flush was on his cheek. He suddenly buried his face in his hands, and bowed it down upon the open Bible. Very fearful was this to see and hear! This

living death of wakeful misery—this vain struggling to render with his own hands the atonement which he, of all men, needed most—while the great Evangel of divine love and tenderness, with its mightier offering and all-availing sacrifice, lay unapplied at his hands.

Anne drew back in awe and reverence, and carefully closed the door—it was not meet that she should pry further into the secret agonies of this stricken and sinful spirit, as it poured itself forth before its God. She returned to the bedside, her head throbbing with dull pain, her heart full of darkness and anguish. Was it true?—was it indeed true?—a haunting fear no longer, but a deadly and hopeless reality!

At intervals she heard the murmuring renewed, and watched in breathless anxiety then, lest her patient should wake—at length it ceased altogether. The young mother slept peacefully with her infant nestling in her arms —a strange contrast there was between the sleeper and the watcher—the one in delicious safety and rest, after deadliest peril—the other wading through a restless sea of grief and pain,

to which there seemed neither shore nor boundary, involving agonies mightier than death.

The night wore swiftly on—the morning rose as calm and sunny as if storms had never raged in the soft atmosphere which it gilded with its early sunbeams. Anne rose to look from the window—the Firth lay broad before her, still something moved and unquiet—rolling long waves upon the shore, and specked like the breast of some war-horse, with spots of foam. At a little distance, dashed against a bold, projecting cliff, the masts of the hapless vessel appeared through the dark water. Anne shuddered when she saw the white spars, rising so very short a way above the broad surface of the Firth. A little longer delay last night—a paroxysm of desperate energy a little less bold, and these hapless seamen, and this youthful mother, had been lying, far from all consciousness of earthly pain or pleasure, in the dark graves of the sea!

Sevenfold—seven saved for one lost! Alas, was this all?—had he no hope but this?

Anne's patient waked—she began to look

about her confusedly—then she recollected herself: "Willie, Willie, where is he?—is he safe?"

Anne hastened to reassure her; but finding that she only partially succeeded, and hearing as she thought some one stirring below, she left the room to seek "Willie," to satisfy his anxious wife.

In a small bare parlour below she found the serving-woman of the Lillies and Jacky—they had just made a fire, and Marget, with considerable grumbling, was preparing tea. Jacky, looking very dark, and pale, and wakeful, was moving about in her own intense stillness of nervous activity, discharging various pieces of work entrusted to her, and returning instantly to seek more.

"I declare," exclaimed Marget, peevishly, as Anne reached the door, "ye're enough to pit a body daft. Afore ane can think ye're weel begun wi' ae turn, ye're seeking anither. Have ye washen a' the cups?"

"Yes."

Marget looked back—the long array of gleaming earthenware spoke for itself. In anticipation of so many stranger guests, Marget

had collected a dusty congregation of cups and saucers, out of the corners of a dark old pantry.

"Do ye aye do your work as cleverly? Ye're a strange speerit o' a creature to get through a turn at that rate. Are ye aye as fast?"

"Ay," said Jacky, bashfully, "when there's ony need."

"I wadna like to be trysted to haud ye gaun. Ye wad be as ill to ser as Michael Scot's man. Get out yon muckle tray, and tak the dust aff't, and set down the cups—it's aye something. Eh, Mem, I beg your pardon!"

This was addressed to Anne, whom Marget descried for the first time standing behind her. Anne asked where the young captain was.

"Ye see, they're a' lying in the kitchen, puir creatures. It was the warmest place, and we made shake-downs to them as well as we could; and no to disturb them, I kindled my bit fire in here—and your lassie is very handy, Mem, and I'm muckle obliged to ye for letting her help me. Ye see I'll hae plenty on my hands wi' a' thae strangers, and trouble in the house forbye."

"Is any one ill?" asked Anne, eagerly.

"Ye see, it's just yin o' Mr. Patrick's ill turns. What was onybody to expect after the way he exposed himsel last night?—a frail man like him fighting through the sea as if he had been a giant—and he's waur than ordinar the day."

"Can I see Miss Lillie?" said Anne.

"Miss Kirstin's been at his bedside close, since ever we got the men sorted in the kitchen. She had to wile him out o' his ain room, because the young Captain's wife was in the next, and she was feared he would disturb her, and he's lying up in the west room. He'll no hear o' a doctor—maybe it's because he kens about physic himself—ony way he'll no have yin near him."

"But Miss Lillie would see me perhaps, if you asked her," said Anne.

"She's no fond o' onybody fashing her, when she's no wanting them," said Marget, "and it's ill my pairt to anger my mistress. I've been here even on wi' her this sixteen year —I come frae Falkirk mysel, and dinna belang about this place—and a guid mistress she is, if she's no just like ither folk. And it's a lang

trail up that weary stair when ane's breath is as short as mine—and—if ye have nae objection, Mem, I wad rather ye would wait till she comes down hersel. She'll be wanting something for Mr. Patrick before lang."

"Will you ask the Captain of the ship to come to me then?" asked Anne.

Marget went with some reluctance, and returned in a few minutes with the stalwart young Captain. Anne begged her to guide him to his wife's room, and then opening the outer door, stepped out herself into the garden for a moment's refreshment in the cool morning air.

Fresh, bright, healthful, tinged and gilded with their young sunbeams, while everything around rejoiced in its lightsome breadth and purity, Anne almost fancied it strange that the joyous air did not shrink from these gray walls—so full of sin and grief—sorrow, remorse, and pain, that shrank from the eye of man, as they were.

When she again entered the room where she had found Marget and Jacky, the young captain of the wrecked ship was there, somewhat

tremulous and unsteady, poor fellow, after his meeting with his wife. They had been looking together from the window at the lost vessel with mingled thankfulness and regret. Anne began to speak to him.

"The boat was a schooner—the William and Mary of Kincardine—homeward bound from the Baltic, with a cargo of timber. We've been water-logged for three weeks; drifting very much where the wind likit to drive us. If it had not been for the summer weather and lown winds, we must have perished before now: we've had a dreadful time—no that I care for a while of hardship myself—it like comes natural to a seafaring life—but Mary and the infant! I was saying to her the now, that she had better make up her mind, to let me go alone after this; I durst not put her in such peril again."

"She seems to have borne it bravely," said Anne.

"Ay, that she has," said the young man, his eyes glistening. "It's often no the strongest and roughest like that can bear the most. For the bairn's sake and mine, and her mother's at

hame, I believe she could have held out as long as myself. To be sure, we sheltered her, while shelter was possible, but that has not been for a while—and now she's less worn out than the men. It's a strange thing that, but I've seen the like of it before. They can stand work—plenty of it—but they canna both work and thole—and we have needed both."

"It is very strange," said Anne, "almost all of them were stronger men than their deliverer."

"Ay it's no that," said the captain of the William and Mary, "it's the spirit that ever does anything. My men were stunned and helpless, worn out with the terrible watch they have kept for three weeks bye-past. The gentleman scarce so much as felt he had a body clothing him, when he saw our peril. It was the keen spirit that did it."

Anne sighed. This unhappy man, borne down by his fearful secret, his life desolated by a great hidden crime, was a very angel of bravery and goodness to the men whose lives he had saved. She asked:

"Will the loss be great?"

The young man's countenance fell.

"No doubt it'll be heavy upon us. It's part my father's, and part mine. We built it just before I was married, as you would, maybe, notice by the name. My mother had aye a great wark with Mary, and she would have it called after us both. When the tide's out, we'll see better what's lost, and what may be saved. It's a mercy the cargo can take no scaith, being timber. Onyway it must be a heavy loss, but we may be thankful we're to the fore ourselves."

Anne did not answer. At any other time, she would have sympathized warmly with this prepossessing, youthful couple. At present, her interest and thoughts were so engrossed, that any other feeling was faint within her.

"Mary was speaking of coming down herself," said the young captain, "to thank you for your goodness. And the gentleman—I have not seen the gentleman!"

"I hear he is ill," said Anne. "I am only a—a neighbour: but I hear Mr. Lillie's exertions have hurt him—he has been long an invalid."

The young man said some words of respectful regret, and then left her to attend to his men. He wished to remove them as soon as possible —especially now, when he heard that there was sickness in the house.

Marget, with a good deal of grumbling, was preparing a breakfast for them. Anne opened the door of a room on the opposite side of the hall—it was Patrick Lillie's study—and went in. She felt she had a right. In all the world, there was no family so closely connected with her as this.

Upon the table, in the recess of the low projecting window, lay an old Latin book—others of a like nature were scattered round. Anne was sufficiently acquainted with old literature to see that some of these were rare and strange. A small pile, which she could fancy the daily and beloved companions of their owner, lay at one side. The upper one of the pile, was the "Imitatione Christi," of Thomas à Kempis, in the original Latin—the others were of the same contemplative cast. Old emblematic poems, full of devout conceits: old dialectic philosophy,

subtle and shifting—a strange atmosphere for that fragile mind, with its sensitive beauty and feebleness, to breathe and dwell in.

She was thinking of him—with her hands clasped over her eyes, and her head bowed down, she was trying to think what she could do—"looking forward as the aim and expectation of your life—almost, God help us—as your hope—for a thing which you knew would rend your heart, and make your life a desert when it came." The words returned before her constantly, blinding her mind and stilling it. She could do nothing.

A hand was laid upon her shoulder. She looked up hastily—it was Christian Lillie. Her eyes were fixed upon Anne with a look of wistful inquiry: her tall figure was slightly bent. Anne saw more clearly than she had ever done before, how attenuated and worn out she was. Yet, in the melancholy face and shadowy frame, there was no trace of greater weariness than usual. She had been watching by a sick-bed all the night—and such a sick-bed!—but she thought of no rest, she evidenced no fatigue. You could fancy the soul within,

so constantly awake and watching, that its thin robe of earthly covering needed not the common sustenance of feeble humanity.

"What do you here?" said Christian Lillie, "this is no air for you to breathe—no roof to cover you. Let us bear our own burden as we best can; you must not try to render help to us—no, nor even sympathy—you must go from this fated house."

Anne took into her own the thin hand which rested on her shoulder.

"You must let me stay," she said eagerly. "I can take no dismissal—you must let me stay—no one else in this wide world could be beside you as I can be—save one. I must remain with you; I must share your labours—you cannot watch continually."

"Watch!" said Christian, "I *have* watched continually, without ceasing night or day. You can rest who are young—you who have known no deadly evil—what rest is there for me? Leave me to my own weird. God knows, who sent it, that He has sent patience also to bear its bitterness. It was long before that came, but I watched, and waited, and prayed for it

dry-eyed: tears are not for me, unless it be the terrible ones that the heart weeps when it is wrung. You must go from this place; let us not throw the shadow of our desolation over another of your blood. You must go before you are blighted."

"Do not fear me," said Anne, anxiously; "do not fear to trust me. Is not our sorrow the same — our hope the same? let me stay beside you."

"The same—the same! God forbid that you knew what you were saying. There are agonies that folk may not lay the light name of sorrow upon. Be thankful that you know nothing sorer than grief; and if you would keep your hope alive, leave the house that contains us."

"I cannot leave you; you must not ask me," said Anne; "I have a claim upon you. Do not you know better than I the bond that there is between us? I will not leave you."

Christian Lillie walked through the room

slowly, sadly, heavily; she made no answer; she seemed to acquiesce at last.

For a time they both continued silent. Then Anne asked:

"Is he ill? they told me he was ill."

"*He!*" Christian paused; over the steadfast whiteness of her face there flushed an unnatural colour. She gazed upon Anne; her wistful melancholy eyes dilating as it seemed in eager inquiry. "He!" she checked herself; it appeared to have flashed upon her that Anne knew something of their mighty secret greater than she had before thought. She controlled herself with an effort—"yes, he is ill; what can he be else but ill?"

"I must return to him," she resumed, after an incoherent pause. "Stay with us, since you will stay; but mind I have warned you, that with us there can be nothing but desolation, and blight, and hopelessness. What depths you may fathom before we are parted, I know not. It may be that you are sent thither for that end. We walk darkling, but

He sees the beginning and the end: let His will be done."

She left the room—in a short time, Anne also quitted it. Marget was arranging in the kitchen the breakfast for the shipwrecked seamen. There was no scant or niggardly provision. The men, gaunt and famished-like, an uncouth company, were gathered about the table. In the little parlour sat the captain and his wife.

"Miss Kirstin said I was to see they had plenty to their breakfast," said Marget, deprecatingly, "and there wasna bread enough in the house; and I'm no sae young as I hae been mysel, forbye having a fashious hoast, and a sore shortness in my breath, sae I took the freedom to send your lass, because she was willing to gang, and I hope, Mem, ye'll no be angry."

"By no means," said Anne. "Jacky will be glad to help you, I am sure."

"She's a willing lassie," said Marget; "but if it werena that she's discreet, and does what

she's bidden, I wad maist think she wasna canny. Preserve me! there she is already rattling at the gate; if she's been at Aberford, she maun hae flown."

Jacky had only been at Miss Crankie's; she returned laden with provisions sent by Anne's kind, active, odd little landlady—there was a full supply. Anne herself joined the young captain and his wife in the little parlour.

In the course of the day the forlorn crew of the 'William and Mary,' considerably revived by their night's rest and shelter, left Schole—with much gratitude expressed and unexpressed. William and Mary themselves proceeded, with their infant, to the house of the husband's father. The men dispersed to their various homes.

Anne remained — only once again during that day she saw Christian. Then she spoke less incoherently, with something indeed of singular gentleness, and an endeavour for the moment to forget her individual burden, . as

though her heart began to yearn for the sympathy of this younger sister. Patrick was very ill; he could not leave his bed.

The next day told the same tale, and so did the next—and the next again. The illness increased. The fever and agitation of that night had wrought their due effect upon the delicate, enfeebled frame whenever the desperate tension and rigid strength of its nervous excitement failed. On the fourth day, Christian, who all this time had watched unceasingly, called the medical practitioner of the little town to her brother's bedside. Anne saw him as he passed down stairs, and asked eagerly for his patient; the doctor shook his head—he could give no hope.

Anne spent the greater part of the day in Schole, returning to Miss Crankie's only for the night. Now, when Patrick's illness had increased so alarmingly, she could only exchange a passing word with Christian on the stair, or at the door of the sick-room. She had pleaded vainly for permission to help her in her

tendance of the sufferer: failing in that, she gradually assumed the management of the household matters below. She lightened Christian's hands, at least so far.

A week after the shipwreck, Anne entered Christian's room—the high turret chamber from which so often she had seen the reflected light gleaming upon the dark waters of the Firth—to wait for her coming. It was a still, dim, balmy night, soft and melancholy. There was always a great attraction in that broad Firth at their feet—a kind of wandering freedom for the overcharged heavy hearts gazing forth upon it. The rounded window was veiled by an old-fashioned, faded curtain: within this there was a seat which Christian Lillie had occupied for more lingering woeful nights than we could count or record. Anne seated herself there, and looked out in the dim gloaming upon the silent land, and gleaming sea

By-and-by she heard the slow, sad footstep enter, and sat still, in expectation of being joined immediately—for Christian, like herself,

continually sought these windows; continually calmed her sorrow in the wide tranquillity and balmy peace that lay around.

"Give him to me for a prey. Lord, give him to me for a prey," were the strange words that came to Anne's ear, falling low through the tremulous darkness; "I ask not for his life. Thou knowest that I ask not for his life. My Father, wilt Thou not hear? wilt Thou forget the prayers that have risen to Thee day by day and night by night since Thou didst hide Thy countenance from us? My Lord! hast Thou said any word in vain? shall any promise be forgotten before Thee?"

The listener sat still in awe; she dared not interrupt this agony of supplication with any token of her presence.

Christian was pacing the room quickly, with tremulous step, and passionate low voice, too mightily absorbed to think of form or posture.

"If it be Thy will—Thy will—and Thy will is to seek and save the lost; and this is lost

in sin, in blindness, and the deep gloom of unbelief, and it was such that Thou camest to save — such, and not the righteous. It is Thy will — it is Thy will. Grant me Thy will of salvation to this sinner — Lord! Lord!"

She paused; she threw herself on her knees; there was an indefinite sound of entreaty—groaning that could not be uttered. Then she started to her feet again, and the words poured forth aloud, as one who finds a new argument, and can scarce pause for language in which to state and plead it.

"Thou who art a man! Thou who bearest a human heart in Thy high heaven! Thou who hast entreated, and yearned, and wept over sinful brethren, whom the adversary sifted as wheat! Thou, O Lord! who wearest Thy humanity upon Thy throne!—he is a sinner—so were they whom Thou didst call Thy friends. He hath denied Thee—so did he, for whom Thy holy lips prayed, that his faith might not fail. My Lord!—my Lord!—Thou hearest

always. Look down upon us, and send us deliverance."

She sat down; she put back her wet hair, and wiped the heavy dew from her forehead. Then she clasped her hands over her brow.

"Not life—not joy—not temporal deliverance—whatsoever is in Thy hands is well—be it to us as seemeth good to Thee. But light, O, my Father! light to this darkness—deliverance to this bondman—the grace of Thine infinite mercy—the touch of Thy divine compassion. Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst deliver him."

There was a faint call from another room. Christian Lillie paused for a moment to compose her agitated features, and then hastened to the restless sick-bed. Anne Ross sat still at the high turret window, looking out through silent tears upon the dim country, and the gleaming sea.

That sky serene, and calm, and boundless, beholding all beneath its infinite extent—that

mighty eye above, looking down amid the countless myriads of its universe, as certainly upon the untold agonies of this house as if all humanity were centered there—that One, at the right hand of the Father, who, in the might of His eternal Godhead, doth dwell in heaven—a man! The appeal of the broken heart was to these; and they do not fail to answer.

CHAPTER IV.

"She had been with him all his weary days,
Like his first garments, her grave sister love
Girded and compassed him; through gloom and pain,
And grief unspeakable, and slow-paced years
That told their moments out in agony,
Her strong hand held him. Lo! his hour of fate
Glides hitherward in evening mists, and now
Solemnly putting off his feebleness,
He must go forth alone."

WEARILY, mocking sick hearts with their floods of brightness, the summer days stole on. The house of Schole, gaunt and melancholy, stood shrined in the full glory of that sunshine. The dark figures within wandered about in

restless pain, like ghosts uncongenial to the light, or gazed forth with vacant eyes upon the rejoicing country, and dazzling sea. In the sick chamber lay that restless, suffering man, wending unconsciously nearer and nearer the valley of the shadow of death.

The doctor from the little town had visited him repeatedly. Nearly a fortnight after the wreck, he had a final conversation with Christian. Anne was watching eagerly in Patrick Lillie's study. Christian accompanied the doctor to the door, and answered his subdued and sorrowful farewell; then she entered the study. Anne looked up anxiously in her face.

"The time has come," said Christian, solemnly, "there is no hope of his life. He has but a little way to go, and yet he knows not the only entrance. God succour us—what can we do alone? Come with me—now there is no longer any obstacle or hindrance—come with me."

Anne followed her silently. The room in

which Patrick lay was high, and had also windows looking on the water—that broad placid, noble Firth, the sole companion of the watcher.

Wan and wasted, with only the hectic spot burning on his cheek to distinguish it from the pillow on which it uneasily rested, lay the dying man. Cold, wasting, death-like perspiration lay heavily upon his brow; his long, white hand and emaciated arm were stretched upon the coverlet with a power of nervous motion in them, which contrasted strangely with their colour and form of death.

On a small table beside him lay a paper closely written. Near at hand were writing materials. His eyes were fixed upon the manuscript—he did not seem to notice the entrance of Christian and Anne. He was speaking in broken sentences, with incoherent intervals between.

"Sevenfold—sevenfold. Thou God of mighty justice! Thou Lord of holy revenge!

What can a sinful man do more? Not an old man, O, Lord! not a little child; seven lives in their prime—seven full of health, and strength, and hopefulness—seven saved for one lost. Lord of mercy, wilt Thou accept them? what can I more?"

"Patrick," said Christian Lillie, "if the whole world had lain perishing at your feet, what more than urgent need was it to save them all; the seven will not atone for the one. If ye have no other atonement to offer, then the blood is still crying upon God for vengeance."

"Christian," exclaimed the dying man, "what can I do?—what shall I do? They tell me I am near the hour of judgment; will you thrust away my last plea?—will ye deny me my last hope? Did He not accept the publican who restored fourfold? Behold my offering, O, Lord, and be merciful—be merciful! I have toiled through all this terrible life—laboured, and groaned, and fainted for the uplifting of

Thy countenance—and shall I go away in darkness, and wilt Thou show me no more light at all for ever? Lord! Lord!"

The thin, worn arms were lifted in passionate appeal—the long white fingers clasped—the wasted face convulsed with despairing earnestness. Christian Lillie knelt by her brother's bedside.

"Mercy and light, Patrick—mercy and light! our Father in heaven does not give them for a hire. Take them out of a gracious hand that has paid a bitter price for the gifts—take them, Patrick. Take them from Him who has made the sole sacrifice that can stand in the sight of God. Blood for blood."

"Blood for blood!" said Patrick Lillie, with a wild shudder. "Blood for blood! has it come to this end? Christian, I have been labouring to make amends—I have laboured in vain: let me pay the price now at last—there may be peace then. Let me away—let me away—I will pay the price—a life for a life!"

He was struggling to rise—his emaciated features shining wildly with his desperate purpose. Christian's arms were stretched over him, subduing the frenzy.

"Patrick," she said, solemnly, "in a little while the Lord will recal the life He has sent so fearful a shadow on. A day or two—maybe only an hour or two—and in this ghastly noon of ours, which is more terrible than the darkest midnight, the sun of your life must go down. The Lord is taking the price with His own hand. Patrick, let me but know that you are grounded on the one rock—that ye can see the one sacrifice."

The unhappy sufferer sank back exhausted. "'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' Christian, it is a just sentence—take me away—I see it—I see it—it is what no mercy can wipe out—no grace forgive—it must be atoned for. Ye hear me, Christian! the price must be paid. If ye would have hope in my death, take me away."

"It is a just sentence," said Christian Lillie, firmly. "Just in the sight of God and man—I say not that there needs no public atonement; but ye cannot pay it now—and I say that for your life, your higher life, Patrick, an atonement has been made. Do you forget Him that died at Jerusalem? they ranked him with murderers—was He one? He was accursed for the shedders of blood. Throw but your sin upon Him—rest but your soul upon Him, and I will have hope in your death—ay! such hope as will cover all the by-gone darkness with a mist of radiance; only let me know that you are safe in His shadow—strong in His faith, and I am content."

"I have slain a man to my bruising, and a young man to my hurt," murmured the dying man, "and I should—God forgive me that I have shrunk and trembled from this fearful penalty—I should pay back blood for blood in the sight of man. Christian, hear me: I acknowledge Him, my Saviour—my Lord—my King. I acknowledge His work—only not for

this—for this I must render justice in the sight of men. Let me go—I have trembled for it all these dreadful years—I have hid me from the very sunshine for its fear—I have doomed them—God bless them! God, out of His gracious heaven, send down the blessings of the covenant upon them! whom I shall never look upon in this world again—to exile and shame for me. Christian, let me go—I see it all now—my eyes are opened. Let me pay the price—then there may be peace; whoso sheddeth man's blood — Christian, let me go!"

"Patrick," said Christian Lillie, "you have told me when your mind was clear that this deed was not wilful, nor springing from a heart of evil against him that is gone. Tell me again. Patrick!—do you mind how he fled into the sacred city in the ancient Israel, who had shed blood unawares, and there was safe? Can you see? is there no shadow before your eyes? Can you tell me? Patrick, you shed this blood unawares."

A wild gleam shot over the sick man's death-like face. His lips moved—he shut them convulsively as though to keep down some thrill of agony.

"I cannot tell—I cannot tell. God help me—there is nothing clear; that I did it—that I took away the divine mysterious life which all the universe could not give back again—Christian, Christian, it will make me mad—the remembrance of it has gone near to make me mad a thousand times. Oh, that my life had been taken instead! oh, that he had slain me, and not I him!"

Christian knelt by his bedside holding his hand—he became calmer.

"Lord, show it to me—show me the past—show me what is to come. I was angry with my brother in my heart—I cannot see—I cannot tell, if the fiend was within me then. Christian, have *they* not suffered a death for me?—have I not slain them in cold blood with my fear and cowardice? I will do them

justice—I will bear my own sin. Let me go."

He sat up in his bed, his excitement giving nervous strength to his wasted frame; as he rose he saw Anne for the first time—she stood awed and wondering by the door.

The unhappy man threw himself back upon his pillow, covering his face.

" Send her away. Do you want to kill me—do you want to betray me, Christian? Send her away."

Christian Lillie made a motion with her hand, and Anne withdrew. Most strange, and sad, and terrible was this scene; this unhappy sufferer enduring in those agonies so intense a retribution—eager to do justice on his death-bed, and yet shrinking from the sight of her who might bring that justice speedily upon him—her, the sister of the injured Norman, who would not have inflicted another pang upon the man for whom her generous brother had sacrificed his all.

She did not see Christian again that day: during all its long, weary, sunny hours, Christian remained constantly by that sick-bed—through the shorter watches of the balmy and tranquil night her vigil continued; those melancholy wistful eyes never closed in slumber; that gaunt, attenuated frame sought neither rest nor nourishment; the agony of eighteen years had come to a climax; the heroic work of all her desolate lifetime was drawing to an end.

Anne did not leave the house till late that evening; she could hear the sound of voices in the sick chamber, and Christian's slow step sometimes traversing it, when she went away. In the morning she returned early. Christian was in her own room, as Anne could hear, while she sat in the apartment below—sometimes kneeling—sometimes pacing it slow and heavily as was her wont, and sometimes with the agitated quick step, which she had heard before during the short time in which she witnessed Christian Lillie's supplications. Her patient

was for the time asleep. She was there, not resting nor seeking rest, absorbed in the unutterable earnestness of her pleadings, wrestling with God for a blessing.

The day glided on, so slow—so wearily, with but the drowsy ripples of the sea, the steady, cold, immovable beating of that strange pulse of Time, whose sound fatigues the anxious ear so miserably, and the irregular, agitated throbs of her own heart, to fill its languid lingering hours, that Anne sickened when she looked abroad upon its cloudless radiance. Then those books of Patrick Lillie's fascinated while they irked and pained her—the pensive, contemplative tone—the microscopic, inward-looking eye—the atmosphere of monastic quietude and meditative death! She was in no mood for studying character, yet she felt how strangely constituted the spirit must have been which found its daily aliment in these.

Had he done that deed and yet was he not guilty? Did he stand in the position of the manslayer, for whom God's stern law of olden

vengeance, in one of those exquisite shadings of mercy, which mark the unchanging unity of our Gospel Lord and Saviour — ordained through ancient Palestine, the sacred cities of refuge? Had he shed this blood unawares? and whence then came the terrible mist which had gathered in his memory about the deed? Was it possible that he could be uncertain of himself? — that he could have forgotten those momentous circumstances? or had his long-diseased brooding over them made imagination and fact stand in his remembrance side by side?

At last, the weary day declined. Christian Lillie came to her at sunset, and with few words, bade her follow to the sick room again. Anne obeyed.

It was very near now, that awful peace of Death. The emaciated face was sharp and fixed—the stamp was upon his forehead. A little time now, and all earthly agony would be over for him.

But there was a tranquil shadow on his face,

and the large caverns of Christian's eyes were full of dew, which did not fall, but yet had risen to refresh the burning lids which had kept watch so long. The manuscript was upon the table still—the thin arm lay quietly on the coverlet. A slight shudder passed across his frame as Anne entered; an involuntary thrill of that coward fear which had overwhelmed his nature. Then he turned his eyes upon her with a steadfast, melancholy, lingering look, failing sometimes for a moment as the slow blood crept coldly to his heart in another pang of terror; but renewed again — a sorrowful look of lingering, clinging tenderness, as though he saw in her face the shadow of another—the generous glance of one dearly beloved long ago, who had given up name, and wealth, and honour for his sake.

"Christian," he said, "Christian, it comes. I feel that I am entering the dark valley. What I have to do, let me do quickly. Raise me up."

She lifted him in her arms—in her strong

devotion she might have borne a threefold weight—the dying man was like an infant in her hands.

He took the pen she offered him into his unsteady fingers, and began, in feeble characters, to trace his name at the bottom of the manuscript. While he did so, he murmured broken words.

"I am guilty—I am guilty! I only. Lord, Thou knowest who hast saved me! Only his tenderness, like Thine—only his gracious heart, Thy true follower, has screened me, a miserable sinner, from the doom of the slayer! It is I only—my Lord, Thou knowest it is I!"

He had signed his name. Christian laid him back tenderly upon the pillow. With a firm hand she placed her own signature at the side of the document, and then gave the pen to Anne. The sister of the man who had done the deed, and the sister of him who had suffered for it—it was meet their names should

stand together. Anne added hers. She could form some idea of what this paper was. She signed it as a witness.

The words of the dying man ran on—a feeble, murmuring stream.

"Christian! he is alive—he is safe! No evil has come upon them! Tell me again—tell me again! They do not curse me—they forgive the miserable man who has made them exiles? It is over now, Christian. All your anguish—all your vigils: their disgrace and banishment—it is over now. God knows, who has visited me with His mercy and His light, why this desolation has fallen upon you all for my sin. I have been a coward. Christian, Christian! when they are home in their joyous household — when they have forgotten all their grief and dishonour, when they are tranquil and at rest—they will never name my name; my memory will be a thing of shame and fear: they will shrink from me in my grave."

The thin hands met in silent appeal. There was a wistful, deprecating glance thrown upon Anne and Christian.

"Patrick," said Christian, "can *we* ever shrink from you, who have been willing, for your sake, to endure the hardest calamity that could be thrown upon man? Can *they* forget your name, who have lost their own for your sake, and never murmured? Patrick! look upon his sister. She has come to us in our sorest trouble; she has clung to us with her tenderest service, as if we had blessed him, and not blighted. Take your comfort from her. As for me, my labour is over. I will live to see Marion. I must, if it be the Lord's will—but for forgetfulness, or shame, or shrinking, ye never thought of me!"

Anne stood by the bedside. The eyes of the dying man, so intensely blue, and strangely clear, were shining wistfully upon her. She could not find words to speak to him.

"Mind them of me," said Patrick Lillie,

faintly. "Tell them, that if they have suffered pain for me, they never can know what agony, bitterer than death, I have endured within this desolate house. Bid them mind me as I was, in yon bright, far away time, that I have been dwelling in again this day. Tell them, the Lord has given me back my hope, that He gave me first in my youth. Tell them, I am in His hand, who never loses the feeblest of His flock. Tell them—"

He was exhausted—the breath came in painful grasps.

"Do not fear," said Anne, gently. "We will remember you in all tenderness, with sorrow and with reverence. I will answer for Norman."

"For Norman!" said the dying man. "All blessings on the name that I have not dared to say for years! The blessing of my God upon him, who has been separated from his brethren. Norman! Marion! They have suffered in exile and in grief for me. Tell them, that with my

last breath, I bade God bless them—God bless them! They have done as my Lord did—they have suffered for the guilty—and He will acknowledge His own."

There was a pause. His breath came painfully. The hectic on his cheek flushed deeper. Christian made a gesture with her hand to Anne, dismissing her. He saw it.

"Stay," he said, "stay—my work is not yet done. Christian, hear me; when I have said this, I will take my journey in peace. My eyes are clear now. I dare look back to that terrible time. I did it unawares. The blood on my hand was not wilfully shed; ye hear me, ye trust me, Christian! I had that deadly weapon in my hand; my mind was far away as it often was. I was thinking of the two, and of their bright lot; my eye caught something dark among the trees. I thought it was a bird. Christian, it was the head of Arthur Aytoun, the man that I was hating in my heart! I came home; my soul was blinded

within me. I was as innocent of wish to harm him as was the water at my feet; but yet in my inmost heart long before, I had been angry with my brother! My soul was blind; now I see, for the Lord has visited me with His mercy. You know all now. I have sinned; but I did *this* unawares, and into His city of refuge, my Lord has received my soul."

The shadows were gathering—darker, closer—the face becoming deadly white. His breath came with less painful effort, but the end was at hand. He made a sign which Christian knew She lifted a Bible, and began to read. Anne stood behind in silent awe, as the low voice rose through that dim room, whose occupant stood upon the eternal brink so near an unseen world. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation." Wondrous words! spanning all this chaos of human sin and feebleness with their heavenward bridge of strong security.

Christian read on calmly, solemnly, while the slow life ebbed wave by wave. She had reached the end.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For—"

She was stayed by the outstretching of that worn and wasted hand. A strange shrill voice, unnaturally clear, took up the words:

"I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord."

Christian sprang forward to support him. He needed no support. In the might of that one certain thing, of which he was at last persuaded, the spirit of Patrick Lillie had ascended into his Saviour's heaven.

A pale, feeble, worn-out garment, over which no longer the fluctuating fever of a wavering mind should sweep and burn—a fair, cold face, whose gentle features could answer no longer to the thousand changes of that delicate and tremulous soul, Christian laid back upon the pillow—no longer restless, or ill at ease, or fearful, but sleeping peaceful sleep — tranquil and calm at last!

And she stood by his bedside who had borne, through all these dreadful years, the strong tenacious life of deadly agony for him. As pale as his, was the thin, worn face bending over him; for a moment she listened with that intensest pain of watching, which seems to make the listener blind, and concentrates all the senses in that one—listening for the faint fall of his breath. It was in vain: those pale lips, until the great day of resurrection, should draw breath again—never more.

"I thank God," said Christian Lillie, in the solemn calm of that death-chamber; "I thank God, Patrick, my brother, that you are safe,

and at rest. Safe after perils greater than time could wear out. At rest after the hourly warfare and deadly travail of a lifetime — I thank God. My Father!—my Father! I thank Thee, who rejectest no petition, that Thou hast heard my cry!"

Her hands were clasped. Anne feared they were becoming rigid in the attitude of supplication so common to them. She laid her hand upon Christian's arm.

"Ay, I will not linger," said Christian, "but look at him—look at him at peace, and blessed at last. Do you see my tears? I have not shed one since yon June morning, but now I can weep. I will not linger; but can you not feel the blessedness of seeing his salvation—his rest in the fair haven — his solemn peace at last? I thank God, Patrick — I thank God!"

"You are worn out," said Anne, gently; "come now and take rest—leave the further cares of this sad time to me."

The tears were falling from her eyes like

large soft rain-drops; there was a quivering, woeful smile about her lip.

"Ay, ay, I will go; I have one work yet, for his sake, and theirs. At peace in the pure heaven of our Lord and Saviour—at rest. In hope and certainty that nothing can shake again, look how he has begun his tranquil waiting for the second coming. He is with his Lord, and I—yes, I will go and rest. Here I take up again the human hope that has been dead within me for eighteen lingering years; it died by him, and by him it is alive again. I will go and take rest for my labour. I trust him to your hands; I have never trusted him before in the care of any mortal. Now, I must rest for Norman's sake, and you will watch for Patrick's; I trust him to you."

And so, at last, Anne was able to lead her to her own chamber. The tension of mind and frame had been so long and stern, that now, when it was relaxed, Anne trembled for the issue; but Christian had borne all the vicissitudes of

mental agony too long to sink now when there still remained labour to do "for his sake, and theirs." She suffered Anne's attendance with a strange childlike gentleness, as of one whose own long task is over; and while she lay down upon her bed, continued to speak of that blessed rest and peacefulness with a tremulous quivering smile, and wandering of thought, which brought the tears fast from Anne's eyes. Deeply pitiful and moving was this pathetic garment of her grief.

At last, sleep was mercifully sent, such sleep as God gives to His beloved—calm, serene, and child-like—the sad smile trembling upon her lip — the mild tears stealing from under her closed eyelids, and her soul the while carried back to times of past tranquillity—the peace and gentle joyousness of the old cottage home.

From Christian's bedside, Anne proceeded to a sadder work; a work too painful and repugnant for anything but callous habit, or deep tenderness. She called up the old

serving-woman, and together they rendered the last offices to the dead.

The solemn, calm, majestic, awful dead, in whose still presence, were he in life the meanest, the princeliest soul of earth must stoop and bow. Strange doom which, with its sad mysterious ending, can make the meanest lifetime a sublime, unequalled thing! Strange death which, in its ghostly silence, can thrust so lightly the vain speculations of man aside, and make our mortal flesh shrink and tremble from the thrilling power of unseen life, that moves behind the curtain of its gloom. What man shall stand in its presence, and dare to say that this is the end? What man shall look upon its majesty, and tell us that it is the mere death at which he thrills and shivers? It is not so—mightier, more terrible and great—it is the supernatural glow of an unseen life beyond that thus appals us.

The moonbeams glided over the Firth in spiritual stillness. The necessary offices were done, and Anne and Marget sat down in a small

adjoining room to watch. The old woman began to nod in her chair; this was to her but an ordinary death, and death to those who are accustomed to assist at its dread ceremonials, loses its awe and solemnity. Anne opened the window as the sun rose, and bathed her pale face in the delicious air of the morning. Under her sadness and awe a solemn joy was trembling. Her work was accomplished—now for the exile's home-coming—for household rest and companionship—for communion with the near and dear kindred over whom her heart had yearned so long.

The country was beginning to awake: the early morning labour of those rural people had commenced. She could see smoke rising from the indistinct dim towns on the Fife coast. She awoke her companion, and then went softly into Christian's room.

But Christian was gone; her Bible lay open upon the table, where she had sought its comfort when she rose. Her plain black silk cloak and bonnet had been taken away.

Anne began to be alarmed; where could she be?

In the chamber of death she was not. Anne fancied she could perceive some trace of her having entered the room, but they had watched in the adjoining apartment, and Anne knew that she had been wakeful. She hurried down stairs and searched the rooms below: Christian was not to be found.

Looking through the low window of the study, she saw Jacky standing at the gate, and hastened to admit her. The girl was shivering with intense anxiety, and alarm—she had been standing there for more than an hour. On the previous night, she had haunted the precincts of Schole in fear and trembling for her mistress, and had been abruptly dismissed by Marget, with a fretful explanation that "Maister Patrick was in the deadthraw"—since then she had been watching at the window of Miss Crankie's parlour. Now, she was awe-stricken, speaking below her breath, and letting fall now and then silent, solitary, large tears. She had

never been in the shadow of death before, and her imaginative spirit bowed before its majesty.

"Jacky," said Anne, "he is dead."

Jacky did not answer—she only glanced a timid, wistful, upward look out of those keen, dark eyes of hers, dilated and softened with her sympathy.

"You will come in and stay with me, Jacky," said Anne. "I must remain here for some days—you are not afraid?"

Afraid! no. Jacky was stricken with awe and sad reverence, but not with fear.

"I do not well know what to do, Jacky," said Anne, thoughtfully. "Miss Lillie seems to have wandered out: I cannot find her."

"If ye please, Miss Anne, I saw her."

"Where, Jacky?"

"I was standing at the window looking out—it was just at the sun-rising—and I saw the gate of Schole opened canny, and Miss Lillie came out. She was just as she aye is, only there was a big veil over her face, and she took

the Aberford road; and she didna walk slow as she does at common times, but was travelling ower the sands as fast as a spirit—as if it was a great errand she was on; naebody could have walkit yon way that hadna something urging them, and I thought then that Mr. Patrick was dead."

Anne did not observe Jacky's reflections and inferences—she was too much occupied in speculations as to Christian's errand.

"If ye please, Miss Anne, would ye no go up to your ain room and lie down? I'll stay and keep a'thing quiet."

"I must see Miss Crankie," said Anne. "The air will revive me, Jacky, and I could not rest. In the meantime, you must stay at Schole, and see that no one disturbs the stillness that belongs to this solemn vicinity. We should have reverenced him living—we must reverence him more sadly dead."

Jacky was overcome—her eyes were flooded—she needed to make no promise. Anne's charge to her was given in consequence of some

grumbling threat of Marget's to "get in some o' the neighbours — no to be our lane wi' the corp." Anne was determined that there should be no unseemly visits, or vulgar investigation of the remains of one who had shrunk from all contact with the world so jealously.

"If ye please, Miss Anne—"

Anne had put on her bonnet, and stood at the gate on her way out.

"What is it, Jacky?"

Jacky hung her head in shy awkwardness.

"It was just naething, Miss Anne."

Anne comprehended what the "just naething" was, and, understanding the singular interest and delicate sympathy of this elfin attendant of hers, knew also how perfectly she was to be trusted.

"Jacky," she said, "what I tell you, you will never tell again, I know: this gentleman who died last night was nearly connected with

us—if Marget asks you any questions, you can tell her that; and my work is accomplished here—accomplished in sorrow and in hope. By-and-by my brother, of whom you have heard, will come home I trust, in peace and honour, to his own house and lands. The work we came here for is done."

Jacky was tremulously proud—but she had yet another question.

"And if ye please, Miss Anne—little Miss Lilie?"

A radiant light came into Anne's eye. It was the first time she had dared to speak of the dear relationships with which she now hoped to be surrounded.

"Lilie is my neice—my brother's child—I believe and hope so, Jacky."

Jacky's first impulse was to turn her back on Schole, and flee without a moment's delay to Oranside. She recollected herself, however; she only sat down on the mossy garden-path, and indulged in a fit of joyous crying—pride,

and exultation, and affection, all contributing their part. "For I kent," said Jacky to herself, tremulously, when Anne was gone, "I aye kent she was like somebody—a' but the e'en — and it would be her mother's e'en!"

But Jacky recollected her charge—recollected the solemn tenant who lay within those walls, and became graver. Marget was sitting in the kitchen when she entered, refreshing herself with a cup of tea. Their salutations were laconic enough.

"Is that you, lass?" said Marget.

"Yes, it's me," said Jacky. "Miss Anne said I was to come in and stay; and she'll be back soon hersel."

"And wha's Miss Anne that's taking sae muckle fash wi' this puir afflicted family?" said Marget. "Are ye ony friend to us, lassie? or what gars your mistress and you come into our house, this gate?"

"Miss Anne says Miss Lillie is a friend. I

think it's maybe by ither friends being married, but I dinna ken—only that they're connected—Miss Anne said that."

"And what do they ca' ye?" continued Marget.

"They ca' me Jacobina Morison—I was christened that after my uncle—but I aye get Jacky at hame; and they ca' Miss Anne, Miss Ross, of Merkland."

"She'll be frae the north country," said Marget. "I never heard o' ony Norland freends Miss Kirstin had. Onyway it maun be for love ony fremd person taks heed o' us—for it canna be for siller. They're a strange family. Ye see the breath was scarce out o' Maister Patrick, puir lamb—he was liker a bairn, than a man of years at ony time—when Miss Kirstin she gaed away. I saw your leddy seeking her—whaur she's gane, guid kens."

"Did she ever do that before?" asked Jacky.

"Eh, bless me, no: she was aye ower feared about *him*, puir man, wha has won out o' a' trouble this night. Maybe ye wad like to see him? He's a bonnie—"

Jacky interrupted her hurriedly. In that imaginative, solemn awe of hers, she could not endure the ghastly admiration which one hears so often expressed by persons of Marget's class for the dead, about whom they have been employed.

"Ye'll be wearied?" said Jacky, hastily.

"Ay, lass, I'm wearied: it's no like I could be onything else wi' a' that I have to do—and that sair hoast, and the constant fecht I hae wi' my breath—it's little the like o' you ken—forbye being my lane in the house. If ye'll just bide and look to the door, I'll gang and get some o' the neighbour wives to come in beside me: there's nae saying when Miss Kirstin may be hame."

"Miss Anne's coming hersel," said Jacky, eagerly. "And if ye would lie down and get some rest, I'll do the work—and I'm no feared

to be my lane—and if ye had a guid sleep, ye would be the better o't."

"I'll no' say but what I would," said Marget, graciously; "and ye're a considerate lass to think o't. Tak a cup o' tea—it's no right to gang out in the morning fasting—and I daresay I'll just tak your counsel. It doesna do for an auld body like me to be out o' my bed a' night."

So Jacky got Marget disposed of, and remained with much awe, and some shadow of superstitious fear, alone within the house of Schole—supported by the sunshine round about her as she lingered at the door—for Marget, in decent reverence, had drawn a simple curtain across the window. The other rooms were shuttered and dark—the natural homage of seemly awe and gravity in the presence of death.

Anne had no difficulty in inducing Miss Crankie to take upon her those matters of sad external business, which she herself was not qualified to manage. With more delicacy than

she expected, Miss Crankie undertook them immediately. Mrs. Yammer was "in sore distress with rheumatics in my back, and my head like to split in twa wi' the tic doloureux—and it's a' yon awfu' nicht—and I dinna believes Miss Ross, I'll ever get the better o't. Johann and you, that are strong folk, fleeing out into the storm, and me, a puir weak creature, left to fend my lane—forbye being like to gang out o' my judgment wi' fricht, for you and the perishing creatures in the ship. Eh! wha would have thought of a weak man like yon saving them—and so he's ta'en to his rest! Weel I'm sure, Miss Ross, you've been uncommon kind to them—they canna say but they've found a friend in need."

"They are my relatives," said Anne: "I mean we are nearly connected."

Miss Crankie opened her little dark eyes wide. Mrs. Yammer began, with an astonished exclamation, to recollect the pedigree of the Lillies, and acquaint herself with this

strange relationship. Her sister stopped her abruptly.

"Take your breakfast, Tammie, and dinna haver nonsense. Is Kirstin content, Miss Ross, to have ye biding in her house?

"Quite content," said Anne.

Miss Crankie's eyes opened wider. She began with a rapid logic, by no means formal, but which had a knack of arriving at just conclusions, to put things together. She had a glimmering of the truth already.

"Miss Lillie is out," said Anne. "I fear, in her deep grief, she has wandered out, finding herself unable to rest; but neither she nor I are able for these details. You will greatly oblige me, Miss Crankie, and do your old friend a most kind service, if you will undertake this."

Miss Crankie promised heartily, and Anne returned to Schole. Again there passed a long, weary, brilliant summer day, but Christian did not return. The night fell, but the

roof that covered the mortal garment of Patrick Lillie, sheltered no kindred blood. Anne had taken Christian's place—she was the watcher now.

CHAPTER V.

"So may he rest—his faults lie gently on him."

KING HENRY VIII.

ANOTHER day, as bright, as weary, and as long, and still there were no tidings of Christian. Anne became alarmed. She sent out Jacky to make inquiries; Jacky ascertained that Miss Lillie on the previous morning had gone by the earliest coach to Edinburgh, The intelligence was some relief, yet perplexed Anne painfully; the arrangements were going on, but what could she do, if Christian remained absent, thus left alone with the dead?

In the middle of the day, Miss Crankie brought her a letter from Mrs. Catherine. Anne's conscience smote her; during Patrick's illness, she had scarcely written to Mrs. Catherine at all; and her brief notes had only intimated his illness, and her hope of obtaining some further information through the Lillies. Mrs. Catherine's letter had an enclosure.

"My Gowan,

"What has come over ye? I have been marvelling these past mornings whether it was success or failure—a light heart or a downcast one, that made ye forgetful of folk to whom all your doings are matters of interest, and have been since ye could use your own proper tongue to testify of them. Think ye this lad Lillie has any further knowledge than ye have yourself? I count it unlikely, or else he is a pithless laggard, not worthy to call Norman Rutherford friend, and Norman was not one to choose his friends lightly, or be joined in near amity with a

shallow head and a faint heart. So I would have ye build little on the hope of getting good tidings from him, seeing that if he had known anything, he must have put it to its fitting use before now. Ye say it gave him a fever? I like not folk, Gowan, who are thrown into fevers by sore trouble and anguish, and make themselves a burden and a cumbrance, when they ought to be quickened to keener life—the more helpful and strong, the greater the extremity; it augurs a narrow vessel and a frail spirit in most cases—it may be other in his. Certain he bore himself like a man in the night ye tell me of. Let me see his sister, if ye can bring her; there seems — if ye draw like the life—to be no soil in her for the cowardice of sickness to flourish on, from which I take my certainty, that if she had kent any good word concerning this dark mystery, she must have put it to the proof before now.

"To speak about other matters, I send ye a letter—worthy the light-headed, undutiful fuil

from whose vain hand it comes. Ye will see she will have none of my counsel, and puts my offer of an honourable roof over her, and a home dependent on no fremd caprice or strange woman's pleasure, in the light of a good meaning—will to do kindness without power. If it were not for Archie's sake, and for the good-fame of their broken house, she should never more say light word to me. He has been but a month dead, this miserable man of hers—that she left her mother's sick-bed for—and look at her words! without so much as a decent shadow on them, to tell where the sore gloom of death had fallen so late. I am growing testy in my spirit, Gowan; though truly sorrow would set me better than anger, to look upon the like of a born fuil like this—her brother ruined, and her man killed. Archie, a labouring wayfarer, with his good name tarnished, and his father's inheritance lost; the husband for whose sake she brought down her mother's gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, taken away suddenly from this world by the red grip of a violent

death, and the wanton fuil—what can I call her else?—as if she had not gotten enough to sober her for a while, returning in haste to her vanities—feared to leave the atmosphere of them—singing songs over the man's new grave, and giving long nights to strangers, when she can but spare a brief minute to say a kind word to her one brother—a kind word, said I! I should say a bitter one, of folly and selfishness, —not comfort to him in his labour, but records of her own sinful vanities.

"Ye will say I am bitter, Gowan, at this fuil—so I am—the more that I cannot be done with her, as I could with any other of her kind. She is still the bairn of Isabel Balfour—in good or in evil I am trysted to keep my eye upon her. I have been asking about the household she is in. The mistress of it, her friend, is at least of pure name; a scheming woman as I hear from a callant of their own vain kind—who has a pride in yoking the fuils about her in the unstable bands of marriage. Isabel has her mother's fair face; they will be

wedding her again for some passing fancy, or for dirt of siller. I scarce know which is the worst. I will have no hand in it, however it happens. Since she will be left to herself, she must. If deadly peril ever comes, I must put forth the strong hand.

"Ye will come to me with all speed when ye can win. If ye have any glimpse of good tidings, or if ye have none — I am meaning when ye come to any certainty—let me ken without delay, that I may make ready for our home-going. To say the truth, I am weary at my heart of this place, and sickened with anger at the fuil whose letter I send ye. Let me look upon you soon, lest the wrath settle down, and I be not able to shake it off again; which evil consequent, if ye prevent it not, will be the worse for you all.

"CATHERINE DOUGLAS."

Mrs. Duncombe's letter was enclosed.

"My dear Mrs. Catherine,

"It is so good of you to think of troubling yourself with me at the Tower, and must have put you so much out of the way, coming to Edinburgh, that I hasten to thank you. Poor dear Duncombe was taken away very suddenly; you would be quite shocked to hear of it. I was distracted. They had been quarrelling over their wine. Poor Duncombe was always so very jealous; and it was all for the merest word of admiration, which he might have heard from a thousand people beside. So they fought, and he was wounded mortally. You may think how dreadful it was, when they brought him home to me dying. I went into hysterics directly, I believe I needed the doctor's care more than he did: before he died I was just able to speak to him, and he was so very penitent for having been sometime rude to me, and so sorry for his foolish jealousy. Poor dear Edward!—I shall never forget him.

"I am staying here with a dear friend of mine, Mrs. Legeretie. She has got a delightful house, quite out of town, and they have come here just for my sake, to be quiet and away from the gay world, which of course I could not bear just now. We have quite a nice circle of friends, besides our visitors from London, and just with quiet parties, and country amusements, get on delightfully. Dear Eliza is so kind, and gives up her engagements in town, without a murmur, just to let me have the soothing quietness of the country, which the doctors order me—with cheerful society—for if it were not for that, my poor heart would break, I am sure—I have suffered so dreadfully.

"You will have heard that dear Archibald has arrived safely at that horrid place in America. What could induce him to do such a thing, when he might have gone into the army, or got into Parliament, or something? and the friends of the family would have helped him, I am sure. It's just like Archie; he's

always so hot and extreme. I thought he would have killed himself that dreadful time at Paris, before he took the fever; and what a shocking thing that would have been for me, with all my other misfortunes. To be sure, it was a horrid, foolish business—that of losing the estate — and if it had not been that dull old Strathoran, where papa and mamma managed to vegetate all the year through, I don't know how—I should have been broken-hearted. I am sure, considering that dear Archie was only my brother, there was nothing I was not willing to do for him; but to go away a common clerk, into a horrid mercantile office! I must say he has shown very little regard for the feelings of his relatives, especially as he knows how I detest these ogres of commercial people. One can only bear with them if they are very rich, and I am afraid dear Archie is not likely ever to become a moneyed man.

"They are so fond of me here, and dear Eliza has done so much to make me comfortable,

that I should be very ungrateful to run away, else I should have been delighted to spend a week or two at the Tower. Mr. Legeretie has a shooting-lodge in the Highlands, and dear Eliza talks of going down with him this year to give me a little change; if we do, we shall come by dear old dreary Strathoran just to look at it again. I hope the Rosses, and all the other old friends, are well. I used to think a good deal of Lewis. I suppose Anne is never married yet; she must be getting quite ancient now.

"My dear Mrs. Catherine,

"Very sincerely yours,

"ISABEL DUNCOMBE."

It was a strange contrast—with Christian Lillie's desolate life before her—with her own heart throbbing so anxiously for the stranger, Norman, whom, in her remembrance, she had never seen—to hear this Isabel, her play-mate long ago, talking of Archie as "*only*" her

brother. The effect was very singular. What had become of the sad sufferer who lay within these walls in the tranquil rest of death, if for Christian, and Marion, and Norman there had been any "only" stemming the deep tide of their self-denying tenderness?

Anne wrote a brief note to Mrs. Catherine, announcing Patrick Lillie's death, and saying that her mission was now accomplished; and that in a day or two she would return to Edinburgh to explain the further particulars of this long mystery. The day was waning again: in weary sadness and solitude she sat in Patrick Lillie's study. From the kitchen she could hear the subdued voices of Marget and Jacky: above, the stealthy step of Miss Crankie, as she arranged the sad preliminaries of the funeral. The second evening had fallen since he departed to his rest; and where was Christian?

A dark shadow flitted across the window. She heard a footstep enter, and pass quickly up the stair. Anne rose and followed. The

footstep was quicker than Christian's, but it went steadily to the chamber of death.

Anne paused at the door. The lonely dimness of the evening air gathered shadowy and spiritual round the bed, a dark background, from which that rigid marble face stood out in cold relief. A deadly stillness—a dim, brooding, tremulous awe—which carried in it a vague conviction of watching spirits, and presences mysteriously unseen, was hovering in the room.

And kneeling at the bedside, her veil hanging round her white, thin face, like a cloud over the tearful pallor of a wan November sky, was Christian Lillie, the quivering smile upon her lip again, and the words of sad thankfulness falling from her tongue.

"Ye are thanking God in His own heaven, Patrick, my brother; the justice is done, the cloud is taken away. Henceforward, in the free light of heaven, may Norman bear his own name; and now there remaineth nothing but

to lay you, with hope and solemn thanksgiving, into your quiet grave."

Anne stood still; there was a long pause. Christian knelt silently by her dead brother's side, in darkness, in silence, in the presence of death, thanking God.

At last she rose, and turned to leave the room. Anne's presence did not seem to excite any wonder; she took her offered arm quietly and kindly.

"I have been very anxious," said Anne.

"Ay," said Christian; "did you think I could rest, and that blight remaining on their name? Did you think there was any peace for me till all my labour was accomplished? Now—you heard me speak—Norman Rutherford may bear his own name, and return to his own country with honour and blessing upon him, in the open sunshine of day. My work is ended: I must but tarry for one look upon them, and then I wait the Lord's pleasure. His call will not come too soon."

"You have taken no rest," said Anne, anxiously: "remember, there is one trial yet remaining. Let me get you some refreshment, and then try to sleep. This constant watching will kill you."

Christian suffered herself to be led down stairs. Into the little parlour Anne hastily brought tea, and, considerably to Jacky's horror, insisted upon rendering all needful services herself. It was evident that Christian felt the delicacy which kept strange eyes from beholding her grief. She took the tea eagerly, removed her cloak and bonnet, and met Anne's anxious look with a tremulous, tender smile, inviting, rather than deprecating, conversation now.

"Let me go with you to your own room," said Anne; "you have been in Edinburgh, and are quite exhausted, I see. You will be better after you have slept."

"Sit down, I need no sleep," said Christian: "I scarcely think now, after my long watching,

that I can begin to think of rest. Sometimes—sometimes—"

She rose and stretched out her thin arms, like one who complains of some painful void within, drawing them in again wearily to her breast.

"Sometimes, when I do not think of *them*, and mind that he is gone, I could be content to bear it all again, were he but back once more. God aid us, for we are weak. Patrick, my brother, are ye away at last? are ye at peace? And I am ready to lament and pine, and not to thank God! God be thanked! God be thanked! that he is away in blessedness at last."

She paced the room slowly for a while, and sitting down by the window, drew the curtains aside, and looked out in silence upon the sea—the placid, wakeful sea—with which so often in her misery she had taken counsel.

"The morning after he went home," she said at last, turning to Anne abruptly, "I saw you

looking out upon the Firth, when I departed on my needful errand. You mind the soft fall of the air, like the breath of a young angel—a spirit in its first joy—the latest born of heaven? You mind the joy and gentleness that were in the air?"

"Yes," said Anne.

"On such a morning—as soft, as joyous, and as bright—he came to me, who is now in heaven at peace. There was no peace about him then. Within his soul, and in his face, was an agony more bitter than death. You know the reason. He had done the deed, for which, through eighteen lingering, terrible years, Norman Rutherford has been a banished man.

"I took him in, and closed the door: he fell down upon the ground, at my feet. From the terrible words of his first madness, I gleaned something of the truth. Think of it—think of that. The horror of great darkness that fell on me that day has scarce ever been lightened for an hour, from that time to this.

"I sent for him, for Norman, your brother, and mine. He came to me, into the room where Patrick lay, in a burning fever of agony and madness. By that time a breath of the terrible story was abroad. It was his gun it was done with. He had parted from Arthur Aytoun in just anger. There were but two ways—either to give up the frantic, fevered lad that lay there before us, knowing neither him nor me, to a death of shame and horror, or for him—him, in his honourable, upright, pure youth—to sacrifice honour, and home, and name.

"He did not hesitate—the Lord bless him!—the Lord send the blessings of the covenant upon him, promised and purchased!—he made up his mind. And to us, as we stood there in our first agony, with Patrick stricken down before us, there was no consolation of innocence. We knew not but what the blood had been wilfully shed: we thought the torture he was in was the just meed of a murderer.

"I gave him a line to Marion: she was at a

friend's house, between Edinburgh and Glasgow. She had gone, a joyous light-hearted girl, with as fair a lot before her as ever lay at mortal feet, to get apparel for her bridal. I bade her go with Norman. When I wrote that, I was calmer than I am now. I, that was parting with them both — that was left here alone with this stricken man and his blood-guiltiness.

"They went away, and he was still lying unconscious on my hands. Then I had to hear the unjust stain thrown upon the noble and brave heart that was bearing the burden. I had to hear it all—to listen to the certainties of his guilt—to hear them tell how he had done it like a coward; and with my heart burning within me, I dared not say to them that he was pure and guiltless as ever was righteous man. I turned from the scorching summer light, and the false accusation, in to the bedside of my raving, maddened brother, and he was the man. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! how did I live?

"Then there came the word that they were lost; and a calm, like what you will see in storms, came over the miserable heart within me. I defied my misery: I dared it to add to me another pang.

"Then I said that Marion was dead—my bird—my light—my little sister! When I said that, I knew not it was false; I believed she was gone out of her new grief; I believed I was alone in the world.

"Then the secret news came to me that they were safe, and then the life struggled through that time of horror, and Patrick rose from his bed. One solemn still night I told him all, and in his agony he said he was innocent. Since that time, through all this life of desolation, he has repeated that at times, when his mind was clear; but his soul was frozen within him in terror. When I spoke of justice to Norman, he shrank and trembled, and bade me wait. What could I do? I could not give him up as a shedder of blood—he was in my hand. To my own heart, and to my Father in

heaven, I had to answer for him; and when I dared hope that he had shed this blood unawares, I became strong."

She paused. She had been speaking rapidly, without stop or hesitation, almost without breath. Anne endeavoured to soothe and calm her.

"Last year, they sent me their child. He had called her Lilie. He himself, whom our unhappy name had blighted. The child was pining under the hot sun of yon strange land. I could not keep her in our desolate house. I took her to Norman's country. I was to place her with his nurse, near to his old home. When we got there, I feared to enter; I trembled to betray the secret I was burdened with. I thought a heart that he was dear to, could not fail to discover his bairn, and so I took her to a stranger.

"When I left her there—you mind?—I met you, and we looked upon each other face to face: I did not need to hear the name that the blue-eyed girl by your side was saying. I

knew you were Norman's sister—I felt that his spirit was within you, and that we would meet again.

"Now we have met, and you know it all. The history is public now. The ban is off Norman's name—your brother and mine. I will see them again—my bird Marion—my bairn, that my own hands nurtured!"

"Christian," said Anne, "for her sake, and for us all, you must rest. There are quiet days in store—tranquil days of household peace and honour. You have done your work nobly and bravely, as few could have done; for Marion's sake, who is my sister as well as yours, and for the sake of the dead, for whom you have watched so long, take rest now. Your work is over."

Christian drew the curtain aside again, and gazed out upon the sea. "For him—for Marion—for Norman; for Thy mercy's sake, O, Lord! and for Thy beautiful world, which Thou hast given to calm us, I will be calm—give me now what Thou willest, and Thy rest in

Thine own heaven, when Thy good time shall come."

And so peacefully, in chastened hope and with gentle tears, refreshing with their milder sorrow the weary eyes that had burned in tearless agony so long, they laid the innocent shedder of blood in his quiet grave.

On the evening after the funeral, Christian wandered out alone. "She goeth unto the grave to weep there," said Anne, as it was said of the Mary of the Lord's time; and she made no attempt either to detain or to accompany her. To Christian, the balm of Anne's sisterly care and sympathy was evidently very dear; but she was not wont to lean upon any mortal arm, and it was best that she should be left with her sorrow alone.

The house had the exhausted, worn-out look which is common after such a solemn departure. Marget sat, dressed in her new mourning, in the kitchen, in languid despondent state, telling Jacky traits of the dead Master, whom, now that all excitement was over, she began to

miss and lament, and weep some natural tears for. Jacky was half-listening to these, half-buried in an old volume of "Quarles' Emblems," which she had recently brought from the study. Anne had opened the low projecting window, and sat in the recess with one of those devout contemplative books in her hand; she was reading little, and thinking much—feeling herself affected by the listless weariness that reigned around her.

She saw a lad come in at the gate, without observing who he was. In a minute after Jacky entered the study.

"If ye please, Miss Anne, it's Johnnie Halflin."

Anne started.

"Has he come from Mrs. Catherine?"

"If ye please, Miss Anne, Mrs. Catherine's at Miss Crankie's."

Anne rose immediately, and proceeded up the lane to Miss Crankie's house. Mrs. Catherine's carriage stood at the door, Mrs. Catherine herself was in the parlour, where Miss Crankie stood in deferential conversation with her—

keenly observant of all the particulars of her plain, rich dress and stately appearance, and silently exulting over the carriage at the door—the well-appointed, wealthy carriage, which all the neighbourhood could see.

"Gowan!" exclaimed Mrs. Catherine, as Anne in her deep mourning dress entered the room. "What is the matter?"

Miss Crankie sensibly withdrew.

"He is dead, Mrs. Catherine," said Anne.

"Who is dead? Who is this lad?"

"The brother of Marion—the brother of Norman's wife."

"Gowan," said Mrs. Catherine, "ye have not dealt ingenuously and frankly with me in this matter. Who is this lad, I ask you? Have you a certainty that Norman's wife was his sister, that ye are thus mourning for a fremd man?"

Anne sat down beside her.

"What I knew formerly was so dim and indistinct that I feared to tell you. They avoided

me—they went away from their own home to shun my presence. In the confusion of my imperfect knowledge, I felt that I could not speak of them. Now I am sure. There is a most sad story to tell you, Mrs. Catherine—Patrick Lillie is Marion's brother—he is more than that."

"Speak out, Gowan. Who is he?"

"He is the man for whom Norman sacrificed all—he is the slayer of Alice Aytoun's father."

Mrs. Catherine started—in her extreme wonder she could say nothing.

"An innocent man, Mrs. Catherine; this dreadful deed was done unawares, and in a life of agony has it been avenged."

Mrs. Catherine remained silent for a moment.

"And he let Norman, the honourable, generous, just lad, suffer a death for him—suffer the death of a lifetime? Gowan—Gowan, is it a coward like this ye are mourning for? A faint

heart and a weak spirit—what could it be other that would let a righteous man bear this for him?"

"There is justice done," said Anne, "it is over now. I acknowledge the weakness, Mrs. Catherine; but he has suffered dreadfully. A gentle, delicate, pensive spirit, unfit for storms and trials—altogether unfit for doing any great thing: one to be supported and tenderly upheld—not to take any bold step alone."

"Suffered!" Mrs. Catherine rose and walked through the room, till the boards, less solid than those of the Tower, quaked and sounded below her feet. "Wherefore did he not come forth in the light of day, and bear his own burden? Good fame and honour—land and home—what was he that a just man should lay down these for him?"

"He was a feeble, delicate, dependant spirit," said Anne: "one of those whom it is our natural impulse to defend and suffer for. That was

his only claim; but you know how strong that is."

Mrs. Catherine did know, but she felt no sympathy for the shrinking weakness which could suffer another to bear its own just punishment.

"I ken? Yes, I ken; but what claim has the like of such a weakling to call himself a man? Eighteen years—eighteen long, slow years—all Alice Aytoun's lifetime. Gowan, I marvel ye can bear with his memory, or lift up your face to me, and speak of him as kindred. He shed this blood unawares, said ye? Did he doom Norman to this death unawares? was it without his knowledge that he laid this blight upon the two that have borne banishment for him? Speak not to me of this coward, Gowan. I say, mention not his name to me."

"Mrs. Catherine," said Anne, "bear with me till you hear his story. If you had seen him as I have seen—if you had listened to Christian

as I have listened, you too would mourn over this blighted, broken man, less in his death than in his life. When Norman fled, he was in an agony of fever and madness, unconscious of what was passing round him—only aware in his burning horror and grief that he had shed blood. When he recovered—and most strange it was that he should have recovered—most strange the tenacious life and strength of his feebleness—he heard of Norman's sacrifice; and then I acknowledge he ought to have done justice, had not his weakness overpowered him. He dared not face the terror and the shame; perhaps the dreadful death due to his blood-guiltiness, and so he lived on—such a life as few have ever lived in this world—a life of despair, and gloom, and misery: terrible to hear of—more terrible to see."

Mrs. Catherine seated herself again.

"And the sister and the righteous man, his friend, bearing a dark weird for him over the sea; and the sad woman at home, that ye have told me of, wearing out her days for him.

Was his miserable life worth that, think ye? Should that not have been worse than any death?"

"Should have been," said Anne; "but I do not speak of what should be, Mrs. Catherine. Why this shrinking, feeble spirit was conjoined with such a lot, who can tell? It had a strange, feverish, hysteric strength, too. When he battled through yon dark waves to save the perishing seamen, you would not have said that Patrick Lillie was a coward."

There was a pause. Mrs. Catherine's manner softened. Anne took advantage of it to repeat to her Christian Lillie's story. The stern, stately old lady was moved to very tears.

"And so at last justice is done," she said. "Gowan, it is meet that this worn woman, after her travail, should have light in her evening-time. If she will come with ye, bid her come to my house. The like of her would do honour to any dwelling, were it a king's.

And she left him at his grave's brink, whenever he was at rest, to render what was just to the banished man? She did well. It behoves that all who ken this history should render reverence. I say she did well."

There was again a momentary pause.

"And where is he?" asked Mrs. Catherine. "Where, and in what condition is Norman Rutherford?"

"I have never asked yet," said Anne. "I was anxious to soothe her; she has been so worn out with watching and grief. I will ask her now, when all excitement is over, and she has only to bear her gentle sorrow for Patrick's death."

"Ay—ay," said Mrs. Catherine, slowly; "ay—and yet you do not ken, Gowan, the terrible, dreary calm that is left by that shadow of death. I speak of the death that carries home a godly, honourable, righteous man, whose life was a joy and a blessing. This is a grief sorer than mine. I bow my head to this tribulation.

I cannot fathom all the depths of its bitterness; it is greater than mine."

And with her large gray eyelid swelling full, Mrs. Catherine Douglas bowed her stately head. Yes! the solitary, desolate, dumb might of anguish with which her strong spirit quivered, when she left all that remained of Sholto Douglas sleeping peacefully in his calm island grave, overwhelming as it was, became a gentle sorrow in presence of the life of wakeful agony which Christian Lillie had borne silently within the desolate walls of Schole.

Mrs. Catherine began to speak of the possibility of remaining for the night. It was a very strange idea for her, who had not slept under a strange roof for more than thirty years. Since Patrick's death, Anne had passed both night and day at Schole, and the pretty little clean bed-room behind was unoccupied. Miss Crankie herself was called in to be consulted on the subject.

Miss Crankie had scarcely entered the room, when there was a rush in the passage. The door flew violently open, and Mrs. Yammer, her head bound up with mighty rolls of flannel, and a newspaper trembling in her eager hand, stood before them.

"Eh, Johann!—Eh, Miss Ross!" she could articulate no more.

"What in the world has come ower the woman now?" exclaimed Miss Crankie, peevishly. "If ye will be a puling, no-weel fuil, ye may keep your ailments to yoursel at least. For guid sake, Tammie, haud your tongue; dinna deave the ladies."

"Eh, Miss Ross!—Eh, Johann!" exclaimed the aroused and excited Mrs. Yammer, "if it wasna for the stitch in my side, I wad read i to ye mysel. Look at this."

Anne took the paper wonderingly. She glanced down a long paragraph, headed "Romance in real life," with hurried half attention, and little interest. Her eyes were arrested by

the concluding words; they seemed to shine out from a mist. Unconsciously, in her sudden excitement, she read them aloud: "This most honourable vindication of Norman Rutherford, of Redheugh—"

"Gowan," exclaimed Mrs. Catherine, hastily, taking the paper from her powerless hand, "what is that ye say?"

"Ye see," said Mrs. Yammer, following up briskly her unwonted independent movement, "we get it atween us. Mr. Currie, the saddler, and Mrs. Clippie, the captain's widow, and Robert Carritch, the session-clerk, and Johann and me; and I was just sitting ower the fire, trying if the heat would do ony guid to my puir head, when I saw that about young Redheugh—and I'll be out o' my wits the morn wi' the draft frae that open door."

"Gae way to your fireside again, and haud your tongue," said Miss Crankie, bundling her sister unceremoniously out of the door before her. "Wits!—woman, if ye had as muckle

judgment as wad lie on a sixpence, ye wad see that the ladies have mair concern in that than either you or me."

Anne had been looking at them vacantly with a vague, unconscious smile upon her lip. Now, when the door was shut, she suddenly knelt down at Mrs. Catherine's knee, scarce knowing what she did, and leaning there, burst into tears. She was conscious of Mrs. Catherine's hand laid caressingly upon her hair; she was conscious of an indistinct mist of joy and thankfulness. It overpowered and weakened her; she could not stay these tears.

In the meantime, Mrs. Catherine read:

"We have just had communicated to us the particulars of a very moving story, another of the many examples that truth is strange, stranger than fiction. We believe that many of our readers, who are acquainted with the neighbourhood of our city, may have remarked

a desolate house, standing in the midst of a very rich country, within sight of the Firth, and presenting a very singular contrast, in its utter neglect and ruin, to the prosperous and flourishing appearance of everything about it. The story current in the neighbourhood is, that its last proprietor perished miserably in the sea, while flying from the doom of a murderer, with the blood of a friend shed deliberately and in cowardice on his hand. Other more ghostly rumours of sights seen and sounds heard in its immediate neighbourhood are of course current also. The account we have now to give of this dark transaction reveals something almost as strange as the re-appearance on this earthly scene of spirits long ago departed. It seems the very triumph and perfection of generous self-sacrifice and 'godlike amity,' and as such we are happy to have an opportunity of presenting it to our readers.

"A few days since, the Lord Advocate received from a lady a full exculpation of Mr. Ruther-

ford, of Redheugh, in the shape of a confession made by the real criminal upon his deathbed. We do wrong in applying the name of criminal to this unhappy man. According to his deathbed declaration, made in the presence of witnesses, and to which full credence may be given, the death of the late Arthur Aytoun, Esq., of Aytoun, so long regarded as a murder, falls under the lighter title of an accident. A dreamy student had been spending an hour of a brilliant summer morning shooting upon the sands, and on his return home fired an inadvertent shot, while resting in a wood, when, instead of the bird which he fancied he aimed at, the unhappy young man heard a cry of mortal agony, and beheld the death of a fellow-man. Distracted and maddened, he rushed home; made some wild confession to his sister of the fact alone, without telling her that it was accidental, and immediately fell into the wild delirium of fever. Mr. Rutherford, of Redheugh, was the most intimate friend of the

family, and betrothed to the younger sister. The fowling-piece, which had fallen from the young man's hand when he discovered the fatal effects of the shot, belonged to Mr. Rutherford. Mr. Aytoun and Mr. Rutherford had parted the night before in anger: every circumstance directed suspicion to the Laird of Redheugh. In her first terror, the sister of the unhappy shedder of blood, naturally sought counsel from the friend who was so shortly to enter into the most intimate relation with the family; and Mr. Rutherford, with a generosity never in our knowledge paralleled, resolved at once to divert attention from his helpless friend by his own flight. The younger sister accompanied him, after a secret marriage. By universal consent he was pronounced guilty: the fact of his flight settled that beyond dispute in the judgment of the world.

"The vessel he sailed in was lost; himself in it, as has to this hour been universally believed. But the strange eventful history of this unfortu-

nate gentleman has not had so abrupt a termination. He still lives, and will long live, we trust, to expend in a larger circle the rare generosity of which he has given so remarkable a proof.

"The unhappy man, by whose inadvertent hand Mr. Aytoun fell, and for whom Mr. Rutherford has suffered, is lately dead. Without a moment's delay, after his death, his sister immediately brought his confession to the proper quarter, so that now there remains nothing but to give to the world this most honourable vindication of Norman Rutherford, of Redheugh. In the consciousness of an act of singular goodness, bravely done, and in the universal applause of all good men, our heroic countryman, on his return to his own land, will, we doubt not, find himself abundantly rewarded."

And thus it was made known to the world—the work of the two sisters was accomplished. Free from all stain and disgrace, radiant in the honour and blessing of generous work and life,

the sentence of justice, and the universal voice of good men, should welcome to his long-lost home and country Norman Rutherford, of Redheugh.

CHAPTER VI.

"Still she sighed
But yet no motion of the breast was seen,
No heaving of the heart. While by the fire
We sat together, sighs came on my ear,
I knew not how, and hardly whence they came."

WORDSWORTH.

THE next day, after a long interview with Christian Lillie, and granting the further delay of a week to Anne for Christian's sake, Mrs. Catherine returned to Edinburgh. At the week's end, when she had rendered what service and assistance she could to Christian, Anne

was to join Mrs. Catherine, and they were to proceed home.

But the invitation of Mrs. Catherine, and Anne's entreaty that she should accompany them, was steadily and quietly negatived by Christian. The day before Anne left Schole, they sat together in the study—Anne was renewing her solicitations.

"No," said Christian, calmly, "no, I cannot leave his grave. I cannot give up my watch of Patrick. You do not know—I pray God you never may—when folk have watched and waited for a lifelong like me, how hard it is to break the old wont, even though it be one of the sorest pain that ever oppressed mortal spirit. I am calm now—you know how calm I am—but I must tarry by his grave."

"And will you stay here," said Anne, "here in this desolate house?"

"At this time I must—my desire is to return to our old home, before Marion comes back to me—I forget she has been a mother long, and a grave tried woman. I only mind

her as my bird Marion, my little sister; I would like to have her chamber for her, as it was before this cloud fell. You shall go with me to-morrow, and we will see what they say—the people who are in the house."

"And where are they?" said Anne, "will you not tell me, Christian, where they are?"

Christian's countenance changed: "They will be home in due time. Your brother Norman will reveal himself to you himself, and you will not ask me further. It is a weakness —a remembrance of my old bondage—but you will wait, Anne, my sister. Let him carry you his own secret himself."

Anne was silent. It was a singular hesitation this, but she could not press her question further. "And will you not come to Merkland —to see us—to see Lilie?"

"I will come when Marion comes," said Christian. "Let me stay until then. By the time this year is ended, as I calculate,

they will be home, and till that time I will rest."

Anne rose, a stranger was at the gate: through the window she descried the good-humoured round face of Mrs. Brock, her earliest acquaintance in Aberford. "Here is your tenant, Christian," she said: "shall I see her? it may fatigue you."

"No," said Christian, "let her be brought in, Anne; it will save us our walk to-morrow."

Anne went out, and met the Grieve's wife, who was greatly astonished to see her. "Eh preserve me! is this you, Miss Ross? and ye never came back to tak a cup o' tea; and I've been looking for ye ilka fine day; and sae muckle as wee Geordie had to tell his father about the leddy yon night; and ye'll hae been biding close a' this time at Aberford?"

"No," said Anne, "I have been in the North since I saw you."

"And sae ye ken Miss Lillie? She'll be

sair put out o' the way, it's like, about her brother. Losh! do ye ken Miss Ross, our George says there's something in the papers about it being Maister Lillie that killed the man, and no young Redheugh. Is there onything in't, think ye? ane couldna ask Miss Lillie."

"By no means," said Anne "she is in great grief for her brother, and you must not allude to it."

"It'll be true then? Eh! to think of a delicate looking man like thon doing the like o' that."

"It was an accident," said Anne, quickly; "he was a gentle man, who would not have harmed any living thing. Do you wish to see Miss Lillie?"

"Ou, ay, it was just about the house, ye ken. George thought we micht maybe come to a settlement about the house. Ye see there's a new yin building at the back end o' the toun, nigher the water—a guid twa story house, and

we've a big family, and George would like to be off or on at yince."

Anne ushered the visitor into the study. Mrs. Brock, honest woman, expended upon Christian some piece of common-place consolation, which made the pale lip quiver. Then she entered upon her business.

"Ye see, we've reason to be thankfu', we've won on no that ill in the world; and George says its a daftlike thing to us to be paying rent for a house, and us has lying siller that could buy mair than yin. Sae if ye're agreeable, he'll make ye his auld offer ower again—twa hunder pounds, and us to get it as it stands, all and haill."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Brock," said Christian, "when you like it so well, that I cannot part with it; but I must keep the house in my own possession."

"Weel," said Mrs. Brock, "of course it's your ain to do what ye like wi't—and ye see there's John Tamson, he began to build a twa

story house, down by the back end o' the toun —and he's broke. Its nae wonder—his wife wearing silk gowns, and gowd earrings ilka day, less wadna ser her, and her was only a ewemilker fræ the Lammermuir! Sae George thinks we micht maybe buy John Tamson's house—its stickit in the building e'enow, but we could sune hae it begun again; and maybe since ye'll no sell yours, ye wad hae nae objection to quit us at Martinmas."

"I shall be very glad," said Christian. "I expect friends home who have been long absent, and this house is not pleasant to me. I will be glad to release you when you choose."

Mrs. Brock was satisfied; and after various other attempts at conversation, in which Anne bore the brunt as well as she could, and did all in her power to prevent their visitor from recurring to the death of Patrick, Mrs. Brock at last intimated, "that she bid to be thinking o' gaun hame—though it was an awfu'

hot stourie day, and she was bye ordinary tired."

Roused by this hint, Anne hastened to bring a glass of wine, and at last their visitor departed.

"So there will be time to restore all," said Christian, as Mrs. Brock left the house. "It is well, I will have a pleasure in it. It is the first time I have said that word since yon June day! Do I look like a woman dead? Is there something in my voice, and face, that speaks of death?"

"Christian," said Anne in alarm, "why do you ask that?"

"Because I feel it, Anne—a dead unnatural calm, like the stillness of the Firth before yon storm—not peace but death; I feel it in myself. When I go about, I think I can hear no sound of my footsteps; when I breathe, I think the air seems to cleave before me; when I speak, the voice has a dull, cold modulation, that is not human. I can think of them all—of Patrick in

his agony—of myself so short a time ago, as feverish shadows—I feel this calm oppress and envelop me like a shroud — I feel like one dead."

"This should not be, Christian," said Anne, "it is but the reaction of stillness after all your labour and watching. How much have you to live for!"

"I have no further work," said Christian Lillie, in her old composure of melancholy, "no further watching—no one now to care and labour for. You do not know my life; when I was a girl, in the days when others are gay and light of heart, beloved, and served, and cared for, I was fighting with a household shame and sin—a miserable, sensual, earthly sin, in the one man to whom I should have looked up for support and guidance: striving to hide it—to keep it from the knowledge of the bairns—the two that were depending more upon me, their sister, than upon him their father; striving, too, with weary cares of poverty, to keep them from want—real want and not mere meagreness. From

that a death relieved me—and then, with only eighteen years over my head, I was left the mother of these two; to protect, and defend, and bring them up, the only near kindred they had in the world. Since then my hands have been full—there has been no lack of vigils or labours in this past life of mine. Now it is over; I have carried Patrick safely to his grave, and seen him laid down there in sorrow and in hope; and now Marion will come again to a bright household in joy and honour. Do you marvel that I think my work over?—the need of me in this world past."

"I do not marvel," said Anne, "but I wish that it should be otherwise, Christian. I would not have your sky overcast with this dull calm; I would have it free to receive God's sunshine; the light he sends upon it, in the evening time."

God forbid," said Christian Lillie rising, and pressing her hands painfully to her breast, "God forbid that I should hide my head from His mercy of joy; God forbid that I should

shut my eyes to His sunshine, or sin His mercies; only I am blinded with this cold calm, and my heart is dead within me. When I am in my own house, bring the child to me—Marion's bairn, that he called by our unhappy name; and come yourself, my sister Anne, that I may begin to live again. Till then, in my own fashion let me rest."

And so they arranged. At the term of Martinmas, or sooner, if John Tamson's house, the newly-acquired property of George Brock, should be sooner completed—whenever Christian had regained possession of the old home cottage, Anne was to visit her with Lilie. At present, all was done for her that affectionate care could do, and on the next day Anne left Aberford.

When in the evening she entered Mrs. Catherine's Edinburgh drawing-room, in its stately pride of olden furniture, gracefully not stiffly antique, she found James Aytoun and his mother waiting to meet her. Mrs. Aytoun

gave her a tremulous welcome, which was half an embrace, and would have been wholly one, had Mrs Aytoun been at all a demonstrative person. James shook hands with her with respectful kindness and friendship. The good opinion of such a mother and son was worth having. Anne felt enlivened and exhilarated.

"Alice has gone out," said Mrs. Aytoun: "she will be with us very soon again. They were to watch for your coming, but I fear these young people become engrossed in their own matters sometimes."

"They?" said Anne.

"Ay, she has a callant with her, ye have seen before," said Mrs. Catherine, "be patient—ye will find out who he is before long."

"Is it Lewis?—is Lewis here?" asked Anne.

"Mrs. Catherine wishes to take Alice from us again," said Mrs. Aytoun. "I am afraid,

Miss Ross, I can hardly thank you for the barrier you have removed. Alice is so young —little more than a child yet."

James Aytoun took up a book, and went away smilingly to a window. He saw that a consultation matrimonial and maternal was impending.

"I do think she is too young. I do not approve of too early marriages," said Mrs. Aytoun, shaking her head. "Why, many girls are but leaving school at Alice's age—she is not quite eighteen yet."

"She is in no peril," said Mrs. Catherine. "It's my hope, kinswoman, that ye do not think ye are sending her into a savage country, where there will be but barbarous people to show kindness to the bairn. There is no fear of her—I warrant her in as careful hands, when she is in Lewis's, as she could be under the shadow of my very sel; I would not just have advised you to wed her—a bairn as she undoubtedly is—to the like of Archie Sutherland; but she is in no peril with Lewis."

The slightest possible additional colour wavered over Anne's face. She did by no means perceive any connexion, logical or otherwise, between the marriage of little Alice Aytoun and Archie Sutherland.

"I am not afraid for her," said Mrs. Aytoun: "it is not peril that I mean; but so young a girl entering upon the care of a house—the management of a family — besides the pain of losing her. If it had not been for your mother's presence, and your own, Miss Ross, I should never have consented—at her age."

Mrs. Aytoun expressed something of what she felt, but not all. She did not like the idea of Alice entering another family, not as its mistress, but as a younger daughter. She felt sure of Anne; but Alice was by no means so exuberant in her praise of Mrs. Ross.

"I do not know what arrangement my mother may make," said Anne, "but, of course, whether we remain in Merkland or not,

it must make a very great, and a very pleasant change to us."

Mrs. Aytoun smiled a dubious smile—she was not reconciled to it. In any way, parting with the girl-daughter was a great venture, but to send her into the rule of a husband's mother, while even the husband himself was comparatively unknown! Mrs. Aytoun was jealous and afraid for her little clinging Alice, whose life hitherto had been so carefully guarded.

"And so you are demurring to the lad's petition?" said Mrs. Catherine. "Well, I do not marvel; but a month or two can make little odds, and ye bid to have parted with her soon or syne."

"Certainly, that is a consolation," said Mrs. Aytoun, with her faint smile. "It is selfish of me, I am afraid, to be so loath to think of parting with Alice; and part I must one time or other, that is true, but still—a little longer, I think, she may be left to me. Your brother has been pressing an early time upon us, Miss

Ross. I do not object that he should wish it—but you must do us the kindness to help me in deferring this a little."

"I believe," said Anne, "that my brother Norman may be home—that we may expect him at the end of the year. I should like exceedingly that he could be present—that it were deferred until that time."

Mrs. Aytoun pressed her hand gratefully—Alice, radiant with smiles and blushes, looked in at the door. "Oh! Anne is here—she has come," she exclaimed, as she ran to Anne's side—Lewis was behind her.

"So my mother has been bringing you over to our side," said James Aytoun, when the evening was considerably advanced, as he took a seat near Anne. "Mrs. Catherine is wavering. I fear to find her throw her mighty forces into alliance with the active, serviceable, energetic troops whom Lewis himself brings into the field. We are by no means pleased to have our little Alice carried off from us so rapidly. I begin to fear Mrs. Catherine is

anything but a safe guardian for young ladies; I certainly shall not advise any client of mine to send favourite daughters or sisters to the Tower, if he wants to keep them out of harm's way."

"What is that you say, callant?" said Mrs. Catherine, "do ye lightlie my good name, James Aytoun? and do you, Gowan, sit still and hear? ye are an irreverent generation! Never you heed, Alison. It is because ye are overlooking the rule of Laban, the son of Bethuel, and cheating him of his elder right."

"If you will come to Merkland, James," said Lewis, "I will say a good word for you to Marjory Falconer. By the bye, I forgot my great news—have you heard about Marjory, Anne?"

"What about her?"

"In the first place, she has made a silent recantation—if one may guess from appearances. A hint of Walter Foreman's the other day, about the rights of women, instead of setting her off

at a tangent, as such a thing used to do, threw her into an agony of blushing, and made her dumb. That is great enough for one report; but I have another. Marjory Falconer—listen to me all who know Strathoran—Marjory Falconer is about to be married!"

"To be married!" echoed little Alice, with a look of laughing wonder and dismay. These two, Lewis and his betrothed, had not got the slightest glimpse of Marjory Falconer yet, well though they fancied they knew her; Anne looked slightly puzzled, and a little anxious: Mrs. Catherine smiled.

"Who is it? who is it?" cried little Alice.

"Anne can guess," said Lewis: "I see his name upon her lips. It seems my news is no such wonder, after all."

"Who is she going to marry, Lewis?" asked Anne, hastily, "it is rather a wish than a guess with me. Marjory does not give confidences of that kind—is it Mr. Lumsden?"

"May all your wishes, sister Anne," said

Lewis, with mock gravity, "be as fully realized. It is the mighty minister of Portoran. Ralph, they say, rebelled, and had a swearing fit when he heard of it, which Marjory promptly checked, however, and sent him down stairs to the congenial society of his horses and grooms. It will be a serious matter for Ralph though, for Marjory, with all her whims, kept things going at Falcon's Craig."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Anne. "It is one of the few marriages that have no drawback; one can feel that Marjory, with her strength and good sense, is safe now, in a pure healthful atmosphere, where she will grow and flourish. I am very glad."

Lewis and Alice exchanged glances and laughed.

"Lewis," said Mrs. Catherine, "hold your peace. It becomes the like of you—callants that have a while to grow before they reach their full stature—to take heed that ye meddle only with things within your power of vision. Ay! ye are lowering your bit forehead on

me, Alison Aytoun; but truly, after all, there are wiser men in this world, to my own certain kenning, than this callant that calls himself of Merkland."

"But Miss Falconer figures very largely in Alice's reminiscences," said James smiling. "To whom shall I apply for an account of her? to you, Mrs. Catherine, or to Lewis."

"I bid ye come yourself and see, James Aytoun," said Mrs. Catherine. "As for the callant Lewis, he does not ken, and therefore it is not like he can tell; but truly, I think ye would be better employed telling my Gowan, whom ye have set yourself beside, the issue of the plea, that Robert Fergusson and you have been peghling at so long."

James obeyed: with signal disgrace and utter discomfiture, Lord Gillravidge's defence had been overpowered. The road through the Strathoran grounds, by the omnipotent voice of the Court of Session, was proclaimed free as the sunshine to all and sundry, its natural proprietors and heirs. Henceforward the pulling

down of barricades was a legal and proper enforcement of the law, and the erection of the same entirely useless, for any other purpose than that of keeping the well-disposed lads of Strathoran in glee and mischief. Mrs. Catherine was victorious, and triumphed moderately in her victory.

"If it were not that I hope in my lifetime to see Archie Sutherland back to his own lands, I would hazard a trial with that English alien, of his title to take their old inheritance from the clansmen whose right it is. Ye shake your head, James Aytoun—I will uphold it in the face of a synod of callants as learned in the law as yourself, that the clansman has the same natural right of possession as his chief; that it comes to him by the same inheritance; that in no way is the laird more certain in his tenure than the humble man, except in so far as he is chief of both land and men, natural protector, ruler and guardian of the same. Ye forget the ancient right and justice in this drifting unsettled generation. If it were not that you

callants of the law, have a necessity of spinning out the line of a plea, past the extremity of mortal life, and I hope to see Archie home within the course of mine, I would see that this was tried without delay, let the whole parliament-house of ye shake the heads of your wisdom if ye likit."

"I am afraid," said James, "we might get the theoretic justice of it approved—but as for any practical result to follow—"

"Ye do not ken," interrupted Mrs. Catherine: "so far as I have seen in my life, a thing does not commonly succeed till it's tried; ay, tried with labour, and zeal, and onwaiting; and it's a poor work that is not worth that. I ken not but what for the sake of the coming race, there is a clear call to try it. If the first bit petty tyrant that took their right inheritance from clansmen, whose fathers won it by the strong hand, had been resisted in his ill doing, this fremd English lordling would not have daured to turn the Macalpines out of Oranmore."

"But we dont all hold our lands by the strong hand," said Lewis Ross.

"Lewis, ye are a haverel; how often have I told ye to hold your peace; and what better tenure could the callant have for his lands, I would crave to ken, than just the tenure of the strong hand? Your fathers kent better, and what they won by their sword and by their bow, was well won I say! won by clansmen and chief together, and by clansmen and chief, in their degree, to be lawfully and justly held—in peace, if the Almighty ordained it so, and if no, in honourable holding of the land they had won, against all aliens and incomers; whether they came by open raid, or with courtesies of craft and falset, as men do in this time!"

In a few days after, Mrs. Catherine and her train, including Alice Aytoun and her maid Bessie, left Edinburgh for the Tower. In consideration of the six months' delay to which Lewis had reluctantly submitted, Mrs. Aytoun as reluctantly consented that her little daughter

should pay a brief visit to Mrs. Catherine—a visit which was by no means to exceed the limits of a month.

Jacky and Bessie, under the safe-conduct of Johnnie Halflin, were to travel by the coach. When the youthful trio reached the starting-place in high glee, an early coach had just arrived from one of the many village-towns in the vicinity of Edinburgh. Jacky's quick eye discerned, among the little knot of bystanders, a tall lad of some nineteen or twenty years, engaged in superintending the collection of boxes belonging to an elderly woman, who stood with a slightly fluttered, agitated look upon the pavement below. The large Paisley shawl, the mighty leghorn bonnet—Jacky threw over them a glance of hasty recognition. Their owner turned her head. The thin, long upper lip was not quivering now—a glance of troubled joy was in the eye—Jacky hastily ran to speak to her. It was Jean Miller. Bessie drew near also. In Johnnie Halflin's presence, Bessie would have had no objection to a slight flirtation

with the young doctor, Jean Miller's genteel nephew. The tall, slight lad drew himself up, however, with the slightest possible recognition. He had a soul above flirtation with maid-servants.

"Andrew's maister, I'm meaning the doctor he's serving his time wi', has ta'en in a daft gentleman to board wi' him," said Jean Miller, aside to the sympathetic Jacky, "and so there wasna room for the callant, and it was needful he should get up-putting in a strange house. Sae it chanced, when I was in seeing him, that I saw some mair neighbours o' his, collegianers, and ae young doctor, that was unco chief wi' him; and it appears Andrew—he's a kindly callant, and has been a' his days—had been telling them o' his auntie, and how I was anxious about him in the strange place, where he had nae mother's e'e ower him, nor onybody to keep him right. Sae what did they do—the young doctor and the auldest o' the students, but they said, that if Andrew would get his auntie to come in and take a

house, they would a' bide wi' me, and that they would be mair comfortable a'thegither, and could help ane anither in their learning. Sae ye may think Andrew was blythe to come out to tell me, and seeing I'm wearing into years, and a'body likes to have a house o' their ain, and in especial for the laddie's sake, that he may be wiled to care mair for hame, than for the vanities that have ruined lads of promise by the hunder before him, as I ken ower weel, I didna swither; and the house is ta'en, and the plenishing's bought, and I'm gaun hame the day. It's a great change to me, but—Andrew, my man, yon blue box is mine too—it'll be a great ease to my mind to hae my laddie aye in my ain e'e; and I hope the Lord will send a blessing on't. It's a' for the lad's guid I'm anxious. Guid kens, I would have little thought o' mysel that am withered, and auld, and past my strength, if it werena for him."

The journey was accomplished in safety. Little Alice was established again at the rounded

window of that pretty bower of hers, looking over, through the golden air, to the quiet house of Merkland, with no phantom of grief or pain or sorrow, throwing its shadow now between; but everything around and before, throwing out that sunny light of hope and promise, beautiful to see.

The day after their arrival, Anne set out to visit Esther Fleming. Lewis had not thought of any anxiety of Esther's; unfortunately, very much as his intercourse with the Aytouns had improved him, Lewis was still by no means given to any great consideration of other people's anxieties, and therefore he had suffered the paper which Anne sent specially for her, containing the first public notice of Norman's innocence, to lie useless in his library without the least remembrance of Esther. He had not the same bond to her as Anne had, it is true, for Esther had never bestowed any great share of her patronage upon "the strange woman's bairn."

A little way from the gate of Merkland,

Anne met Marjory Falconer. Marjory had the slightest possible air of timidity hanging upon her, with a singular grace. She was a little afraid of Anne's reception of her intended marriage—whether she already knew—and if she would lecture, or rally her.

"Come with me to the Tower first," said Marjory, drawing Anne's arm within her own. "I want to see little Alice Aytoun—and I have a great deal to say to you."

"I am glad you have the grace to acknowledge that," said Anne, smiling; "but I do think, Marjory, that some of it should have been said sooner."

"Anne!" exclaimed Marjory Falconer, with one of her violent blushes, "you would not have had *me* speak to *you*, the way young ladies speak in novels."

"Many young ladies in novels speak very sensibly, Marjory," said Anne.

"Very well—never mind, that is all over now. Tell me of your own matters, Anne—you have not returned to Merkland as you went

away; there is to be no more brooding, no more unhappiness?"

Anne told her story briefly, as they went up Oranside. Marjory was much affected. To her strong, joyous spirit, in its vigorous contendings with mere external evil, and now in the prospective strength and honour of its new, grave, happy household life, the mention of these agonies came with strange power. Nothing like them, as the fair promise of her future went, should ever enter the healthful precincts of the Manse of Portoran, yet her heart swelled within her in deep sympathy, as the hearts of those swell who feel that they themselves also could bear like perils and miseries—the true fraternity.

In the inner drawing-room they found little Alice alone, and there ensued some gayer *badinage*, which Marjory bore with wonderful patience, and a considerable amount of blushing laughter, inevitable in the circumstances. "The only thing is," said Marjory, with a look of comical distress, "what I shall do with Ralph

—I wish somebody would marry him—I do wish some one would do me the especial favour of marrying Ralph !"

Little Alice Aytoun looked up in wonder. It was Alice's wont to be greatly puzzled with those speeches of Marjory's, and quite at a loss to know how much was joke, and how much earnest.

"Yes, indeed," said Marjory, laying her hand on Alice's shoulder. "I think it would have been a very much more sensible thing for you, litle Alice Aytoun, to have fallen in love with my poor brother Ralph, who needs somebody to take care of him, than with that rational, prudent Lewis of Anne's, who can take such very good care of himself."

Alice drew herself up, and was half inclined to be angry; but glancing up to Marjory's face, ended in laughing, blushing, and wondering.

"And yet that must have been very unsatisfactory too," said Marjory, smoothing Alice's fair hair as she would have done a child's, "for

then, I had been certainly *thirled* to Falcon's Craig to take care of you both—to see that Ralph was not too rough with you, and that you were not too gentle with him. No, we must have some one who can hold the reins. Altogether you have chosen better for yourself, little Alice—Lewis will take care of you. But who shall I get to manage Ralph?"

"Perhaps Anne will," suggested Alice, wickedly.

Anne was full three-and-twenty, and she was not even engaged! Little Alice, with a touch of girlish generosity, felt the superiority of her own position almost painful.

"Hush, little girl," said the prompt Marjory. "Anne is not a horsewoman; besides I won't endanger a friend's interest, even for the sake of getting Ralph off my hands. Anne is—"

"Oh! is Anne engaged?—is Anne engaged?" cried little Alice, clapping her hands. Alice had been a good deal troubled by this same want of

an engagement for Anne, and had even been secretly cogitating, in her own mind, whether it might not be possible to direct the attention of her grave brother James to the manifold good qualities of Lewis's sister.

"Now, pray, do you two brides leave me undisturbed in my humble quietness," said Anne, good-humouredly. "Why there is Jeanie Coulter to be married next week—and then yourselves—if I do not hold my ground, there will not be a single representative left of the young womanhood of Strathoran, and that is a calamity to be avoided by all means. I must really go to Esther Fleming's now. Do you go with me, Marjory?"

Marjory assented, and they left the Tower; instead of going directly to Esther Fleming's house, Anne went round by the mill. On reaching Mrs. Melder's, they found that good woman standing, with a puzzled look, before her table, on which lay a parcel, which Anne had sent with Jacky, of mourning for the child. Lilie herself stood by, regarding the little black

frock, in which she was dressed, with a look of childish gravity. The mourning chilled the little heart, though after being convinced that nothing ailed papa, mamma, or Lawrie, Lilie, in Anne's bed-chamber, the previous night, had heard of her uncle's death, with only that still awe natural to the blythe little spirit, "feeling its life in every vein." She did not know the strange uncle Patrick, who was dead. It only subdued the gay voice a very little, and sent some sad speculations into the childish head—a place where grave speculations are rife enough sometimes, whether we of the elder generation discern them or no.

When Anne and Marjory approached the door, the child ran to meet them. "Oh, aunt Anne—my aunt Anne!"

Marjory Falconer looked puzzled—she had not heard this part of Anne's story.

"This is my niece," said Anne, with a slight tremor. "This is Lilias Rutherford, my brother Norman's child."

"Anne!" exclaimed Marjory, in amazement,

"what do you mean?" Mrs. Melder pressed forward no less astonished.

"This little stranger," said Anne, holding the child's hand, "is the daughter of my brother Norman, of whom you have heard so much, Marjory—my niece, Lilias Rutherford."

Marjory Falconer, in the extremity of her astonishment, snatched up Lilie in her arms, and ran out with her into the open sunlight, as if to satisfy herself that Anne's new-found niece was indeed the little Spanish Lilie, whose strange coming to the mill had been so great a wonder to the countryside.

"Ye're no meaning you, Miss Anne?" exclaimed Mrs. Melder, anxiously, "it's only a joke wi' Miss Falconer—ye're no meaning it?"

"Indeed I am," said Anne, "Lilie is truly my niece, Mrs. Melder; the daughter of a brother who has been long lost to us, but whom we have now found again."

"Eh!" cried Mrs. Melder, "that'll be the

auld leddy's son that was said to have killed anither man—and ye wad aye ken it, Miss Anne? Keep me! To think of me telling ye about the leddy, and you kenning a' the time wha the bairn was."

"No, you do me injustice," said Anne, eagerly. "At that time I had not the slightest idea who Lilie was, and it is only a week or two since I was certain."

Mrs. Melder did not look perfectly contented. "Weel, nae doubt it's my pairt to be thankfu' that the bairn has friends o' her ain, that can be better for her than me—and it's like ye'll do taking her to Merkland, Miss Anne?" Mrs. Melder lifted the corner of her apron to her eye, and tried to look offended and indifferent.

"I want to take her down with me to-day," said Anne, "and we can arrange about that afterwards. Lilie, come here, I want you to go with me to Merkland."

Mrs. Melder took Lilie's little bonnet, and drew the child to her knee to put it on. "And

they're gaun to take ye away frae me, my lamb! but ye'll aye mind us, Lilie? and when ye're a grand leddy, ye'll no forget the wee house at the mill, that ye lived in when ye were a bairn?" Mrs. Melder's eyes were overflowing.

"Dinna greet," whispered Lilie, clinging to her kind nurse, "if my aunt Anne takes me to stay at Merkland, I'll come down every day—me and Jacky—and when mamma comes, she'll come and see you. Eh!" cried Lilie, forgetting her sympathy with Mrs. Melder in her remembrance of one dearer than she; "you never saw a lady so bonnie as my mamma!"

"Ay, but, Lilie," said the good woman, applying the apron to her eyes again, "ye dinna think how we'll miss ye here. There'll aye be the wee bed empty at nicht, and aye the wee facie away in the morning. Oh! Lilie, my lamb!"

"But I'll come down every day," said Lilie, in consolation; "and when mamma comes, I'll

bring her to see you, and papa, and Lawrie; and Jacky will bring me every day, and when I'm a big lady, I'll come my lane."

They went down Oranside together, Lilie holding a hand of Anne and Marjory, and skipping gaily between them. Marjory Falconer spoke little: she had not yet overcome her surprise.

Esther Fleming sat by the door of her cottage, knitting a stocking, and enjoying the sunshine. Her young niece was going lightly about within, "redding up" the lightsome clean apartment. The old woman looked very cheerful, neat and comfortable, her snow-white muslin cap covering her gray hair, and closely surrounding her sensible, kindly face. She started from her seat as she saw Anne.

"Eh, Miss Anne, are ye come at last?" but her face darkened with disappointment as she perceived Marjory and the child.

"I would have come sooner, Esther," said Anne, "but that I thought you had been told."

"Told what?" Esther staggered back to her seat, and sitting down there, supported her head firmly between her hands. "For guid sake, Miss Anne, say it out, whatever it is. Let me hear it at once. Young lady go away, and let my bairn tell me her tidings."

"I may tell them before all the world Esther," said Anne, "Norman is innocent, known and declared to be so, in the face of all men, free to return to his own house and name, in honour and peace, and good fame. All our sorrow and trouble for him are over. He is safe, Esther. He is justified in the sight of the world."

The old woman uttered a cry—a low, wild, unconscious cry. She might have done the same had it been bitter sorrow that overwhelmed her, instead of a very agony and deluge of joy and thankfulness. She threw her apron over her head—under its covering they could see the motion of her hands, the bowing of her head. Prayers innumerable, offered by night and day for eighteen years, that had lain unanswered

till this time, before yon Throne in Heaven, were pouring back upon her now in a flood of blessedness. It was meet that they should stand apart in silent reverence, while thus, in the presence of the Highest, His old and faithful servant rendered thanks, where so long she had poured forth her petition for mercy.

At last she raised her head—her clear and kindly features trembling yet with the storm of joy that had swept over them; her eye fell upon the child. She had seen Lilie once or twice before, but never before in this strong light which tinged everything with a remembrance of Norman. She started to her feet: "Wha are ye, bairn? wha are ye?—for ony sake, Miss Anne, tell me wha this is?"

Anne took Lilie's hand, and led her to Esther's side; the child looked up wonderingly with those large dark wistful eyes of hers, almost as Christian Lillie had been wont to look—Anne placed her in the arms of her father's devoted, loving friend. "Esther, you have a better right to her than I—she is my

brother's child—she is the daughter of Norman, for whom you have sorrowed and prayed so long."

And Marjory Falconer stood apart, repeating to herself in a low voice, which trembled sometimes, that Psalm, the blessing of the good man, sung by the Hebrew people in the old time, as they journeyed to Jerusalem, and familiar now to us in Scotland, as the household words of our own land—

"Behold each man that fears the Lord,
Thus blessed shall he be,
The Lord shall out of Sion send,
His blessing unto thee,
Thou shalt Jerusalem's good behold,
While thou on earth dost dwell,
Thou shalt thy children's children see,
And peace on Israel!"

CHAPTER VII.

" She crossed him once, she crossed him twice,
That lady was so brave,
The fouller grew his goblin hue,
The darker turned the cave.
She crossed him thrice, that lady bold,
He rose beneath her hand,
The fairest knight on Scottish mold,
Her brother, Ethert Brand!"

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

THE months travelled on peacefully; Jeanie Coulter and Walter Foreman were married with all due mirth and rejoicing. Ada Mina was reigning now, in the absence of all rival powers,

acknowledged belle and youthful beauty of Strathoran; and had been thrown into an immense flutter, to the great dismay and manifest injury of a young Muirland laird from the west, who had come to take lessons in agriculture from Mr. Coulter, and was very assiduously paying court to Mr. Coulter's daughter—by a hint from Mrs. Catherine, of a possible visit to the Tower of the Honourable Giles. Little Harry Coulter, the Benjamin of Harrows, was more desperately in love than ever with the stranger Lilie, now living at Merkland, in her full dignity as Merkland's niece; and with his first knife had already constructed, with mighty deliberation and care, a splendid model of a patent plough, to be laid at the small feet of his liege lady, who unfortunately had no manner of appreciation of patent ploughs, and greatly preferred Charlie Fergusson's present, a boat — a veritable boat with little white silken sails, elaborated in the Woodsmuir nursery by Mary Fergusson and Flora Macalpine, and which could actually, with

a fairy cargo of moss and ruddy autumnal wild-flowers, make genuine voyages upon the Oran, to the delight of Lilie and the Woodsmuir party, and the immense disgust of Harry Coulter. Lilie was becoming a great pet at Merkland, "evendown spoiled," as Mrs. Melder said, with the slightest possible tinge of jealousy; the constant companion and pupil of Anne, the plaything of Lewis, and even—so great was the witchery of the fair fresh childhood—a favourite with Mrs. Ross herself, whom aunt Anne taught Lilie to approach with the greatest reverence, and to call grandmamma—mamma would not do. Lilie stoutly resisted the bestowal of that sacred name upon any individual except the one enthroned in the loyal little heart, the *bonniest* of all existent ladies; the especial *mother* of the loving child.

In the beginning of winter, Anne paid her promised visit to Christian, carrying little Lilie with her. New life was budding again in the large melancholy heart which had lived through a lingering death for so many years.

A deep sorrow, and tender remembrance of the dead carried about with her in religious silence, shunning common sight and common comment, did not prevent this. It was not meet that the griefs of such a spirit should pass lightly away, nor was it possible; but bordering the deep stillness of that lasting sorrow were other holds on life. Hope for Marion, the little sister of her happier days; reverent enjoyment of God's mercies, which one who had bowed to His chastisements so long was not like to hold lightly; a sympathy, exquisitely deep and tender, with everything of nature, and much of humanity—all swelling up from the strong vitality, healthful and pure and heaven-dependant, which God had placed, as a fountain in his servant's heart, before He laid her mighty load upon her.

Anne and the child remained for a considerable time with Christian. She had settled again in the old cottage, and was already making arrangements for the repair of Redheugh. When Anne parted with her, it was in

the confidence of meeting her again in the end of the year, when Norman and Marion should have returned; a light passed over the wan face, as Christian said those words, but still she did not say from whence the exiles were to return. Anne could not press the question, and the time was not very long to wait. Lilie returned with her to Merkland.

The year waned; the December days again darkened over the sky of Strathoran. Mr. Lumsden of Portoran had refurnished his Manse, in a style which utterly scandalized Mrs. Bairnsfather. Some one presented him with a whole library of additional books—the same individual that had lately put into his hand money enough to build a school-house in the hamlet at Oran Brig, at which already masons and joiners were working merrily, and under whose shelter Mr. Lumsden himself had vowed to preach, let the Presbytery storm as it pleased. Mrs. Bairnsfather moved her husband to appeal the case to the Assembly this time, if the Synod's thunders proved unavailing. Mr.

Bairnsfather, very much disgusted as he was—was dubious. A certain mighty man in an obscure Fife parish, lying on the south side of the Tay—a wondrous visionary man, who seeing the first experiments made with gas in the streets of the mighty cities, had tubes laid for the conveyance of the same to the pleasant parlours of that rural Manse of Kilmany, had discovered a mighty truth by that time, and was beginning to throw the rays of it from that marvellous lamp of his, over the Tay, to be over all Scotland ere long. The truth that preaching proprieties would not do; that ministers of Christs holy evangel must preach Christ—nothing less, and that the name of the Lord was the strong Tower—it and no other—in which purity of soul and life could be kept unsullied and undimmed for ever. And vigorous athletic forces, whose front rank, among other sons of Anak, stood that restless man of might and labour, so long called firebrand and fanatic, the Rev. John Lumsden of Portoran were pressing into the highest places

of the Church, with this greatest of Scottish men at their head. So Mr. Bairnsfather sagaciously, over his gardening, resolved that it might be well to proceed with caution in this matter, and that the eye of a General Assembly in this great renewing of its youth, might see shortcomings in his own ministerial life and conversation, not particularly adapted for the light of the day; in consequence of which prudent doubts, Mr. Lumsden escaped a call to the bar of the supreme judicatory of the Church.

He was not married yet, however, for Marjory Falconer was still disconsolately, and in vain, looking out for some one who would do her the especial favour of marrying Ralph.

Mrs. Ross was becoming reconciled to the inevitable marriage of Lewis. It was to take place some time about the new year—the special period depending upon the looked for arrival of Norman. Little Alice, with her girlish kindness of heart, had put a decided negative

upon Lewis's proposal, that his mother should leave Merkland. Surely they could all dwell together in unity. Alice had considerable confidence in her own powers of charming. To a little bride of eighteen, whom all the stronger natures round her instinctively conspired to guard and defend from evil, the confidence was natural and becoming enough.

In the meantime, Alice had been plotting somewhat ineffectually to direct the especial attention of that grave brother James of hers to Anne, and Anne's to him. It by no means succeeded. They were the best friends in the world, but clearly, even to the solicitous eye of Alice, as comfortably indifferent to each other as it was possible for very good friends to be.

Mr. Fergusson's work went on prosperously in the bleak lands of Loelyin and Lochend. The sides of the glen of Oranmore were covered with the flocks of the Southland farmer. In the glen itself, those roofless walls stood still desolate and silent, the end of many a stern

pilgrimage made by the ejected Macalpines, who from their cottages in the low-country, and from fishing-boats on the wide seashore beyond Portoran, looked forward constantly with silent prayers, and stern onwaiting, for the return of their chief, and the recovery of their homes.

He, this hapless chief of theirs, had heard ere now of their calamity, and in an agony of bitter earnestness had plunged again into his labour, his hope swelling within him, in a burst of force which made it almost painful — for them—also like himself heirs of the soil—and for their inheritance. It had been some relief to his burning eagerness, could he have cried his war-cry as his ancestors did, and rushed on—

To the rescue! There never was deed of olden arms, or bold knight-errantry more instinct with chivalrous honour and energy than this, though the battle-field was counting-room and market-place, and the wrestler a broken man!

Lord Gillravidge had returned to Strathoran, greatly to the chagrin of his useful friend, Mr. Fitzherbert, who had been, through all the intervening time laboriously endeavouring to convince his Lordship of the insupportable *ennui* of this out-of-the-world place of his. His Lordship was more than half convinced; nevertheless there was excellent shooting, and Lord Gillravidge filled his house with sportsmen, to the defiance of *ennui*, which, reigning supreme in presence of *one* bore, seems to be expected to dissipate itself in the society of twenty.

One evening late in the year, Mr. Fitzherbert chanced inconsiderately to pass through the little hamlet at the Brig of Oran, after the darkening. It was a beautiful, clear, frosty night. Hardy, strong, red and blue children, were sliding on the frozen Oran; young men and douce fathers, had been tempted to join them. Cottage doors were open on all sides, revealing homely interiors, partially lighted by the kindly firelight; grandmothers seated by the firesides; mothers stirring with care and

painstaking the mighty pot of wholesome "parritch" for their evening meal; elder sisters, eager to be out upon the slide, rapidly, and with much noise, putting upon the table bowls and plates to receive the same; while some who had finished the process stood at the door calling impatiently to boys and men, to "come in afore the parritch cules." Through this peaceful place, Mr. Fitzherbert inconsiderately passed alone. He had scarcely entered it, when he was recognised by a band of children on the ice. The youngsters of the Brig of Oran were just in such a state of exhilaration, as made them ready for mischief in all its possible varieties. "Eh!" cried out a stout lad of fourteen, at the top of his considerable voice, "yonder's the man that Angus Macalpine shore like a sheep at the stepping stanes!"

"Great cry and little woo!" shouted another, adding also the latter line of the proverb, in all its ludicrous expressiveness.

"Eh man!" continued a third, "I wadna

hae lain still, and gotten my head cuttit when I wasna wanting it."

Mr. Fitzherbert was perfectly blind and dumb with rage; in the midst of a chorus of laughter he hurried on.

"Never you heed, my man," said the shoemaker's wife, known as "a randy" beyond the precincts of the Brig of Oran, "ye've gotten new anes—they're grown again."

"Grown again!" ejaculated a little old wifie, whose profession was that of an itinerant smallware dealer, and who was privileged as an original, "grown again!" and she lifted her quick little withered hand to Fitzherbert's face, as she glided in before him; "let-abee shearing —I wad a bawbee the new anes wadna stand a pouk."

And secure in the protection of the hardy mason, under whose rooftree she was to receive shelter for the night, the old wifie extended her fingers to the graceful ornament of hair which curled over Mr. Fitzherbert's lip. We cannot

tell what dread revelations might have followed, had not Lord Gillravidge's unfortunate friend dashed the old woman aside, and saved himself by flight. Poor old Nannie paid for her boldness by a slight cut upon her withered brow—her host growled a thundery anathema, and the well-disposed lads of the hamlet pursued the fugitive with gibes and shoutings of revengeful derision up to the very gate of Strathoran.

After which stimulating adventure, Mr. Fitzherbert's arguments became so potent and earnest, that Lord Gillravidge was moved by them, and finding likewise that Mr. Whittret turned out by no means the most honourable of stewards, and that this great house was enormously expensive, his Lordship took it into his serious consideration whether it might not be the wisest course to get rid of Strathoran.

December passed away—the new year came, and still there were no tidings of Norman. Anne became anxious and uneasy; but Chris-

tian's letters said, and said with reason, that the delay of a week or so, was no unusual matter in a long sea voyage. Where was he then, this exile brother?

Lewis was not to be put off so easily. He did not see why a matter of so much importance as his marriage should be delayed for the uncertain arrival of Norman. So the day was determined on at last; the ceremony was to be performed at the Tower, by Mrs. Catherine's especial desire—in the end of January; if Norman came before that time, so much the better; if not they would go on without him.

A fortnight of the new year was gone already; the Aytouns had arrived at the Tower. Mrs. Aytoun and her son, under the escort of Lewis, had gone down to Merkland to pay a formal visit to Mrs. Ross. Anne was at the Tower with Lilie. She had been there of late, even more than usual. It was Mrs. Catherine's desire that her favourite should remain with her permanently, when Alice had taken her place in

Merkland. It pleased Anne greatly to have the alternative, but until the return of Norman, she made no definite arrangement.

The afternoon was waning—Alice was in very high spirits, a little tremulous and even something excited. Her wedding-day began to approach so nearly.

She had been sitting close by Anne's side, engaged in a long and earnest conversation, wherein the elder sister had many grave things to speak of, while the younger, leaning on her in graceful dependence, listened and assented reverently, forgetting for the moment what a very important little personage, she herself, the future Mrs. Ross of Merkland, was.

Mrs. Catherine entered the room suddenly, with a newspaper in her hand, and a triumphant expression in her face. "Here is news, Gowan, news worth hearkening to. Did I no ken the cattle would not be suffered to do their evil pleasure long in the house of a good man? Now in a blythe hour, we will be clear of the

whole race of them—unclean beasts and vermin as they are. Look at this."

Anne started when she did so; it was a long advertisement setting forth, in auctioneer eloquence, the beauties and eligibilities of the desirable freehold property of Strathoran, which was to be offered for sale, on a specified day in spring, within a specified place in Edinburgh.

"What think ye of that?" said Mrs. Catherine. "We have smitten the Philistines and driven them out of the land—a land that it is my hope will be polluted with the footsteps of the like of them never more in my day, though truly I am in doubt how we will get the dwelling purified, to make it fit for civilized folk."

"And what do you mean to do?" said Anne, eagerly. "It may be bought by some other stranger: it may be—"

"Hold your peace, Gowan," said Mrs. Catherine; "are you also joining yourself to the witless bairns that would give counsel to gray

hairs. It may be! I say it shall be! The siller will aye be to the fore, whether I am or no, and think ye I will ever stand by again, and let a fremd man call himself master of Strathoran—the house that Isabel Balfour went into a bride, and went out of again, only to her rest? It has been a thorn in my very side, this one unclean and strange tenant of it. Think ye I will ever suffer another?"

"And what then?" said Anne, with anxious interest.

"We must get it bought, without doubt," said Mrs. Catherine. "You are slower of the uptake, Gowan, than is common with you. Whether I myself have, or have not, sufficient siller is another matter. There are folk in Scotland, who ken the word of Catherine Douglas, and can put faith in it. Before three months are over our heads, an it be not otherwise ordained, Archie Sutherland shall be infeft of his land again."

"Oh! Anne, are you not glad?" exclaimed little

Alice: "we shall have Mr. Sutherland back again."

Anne did not feel herself particularly called upon to express gladness, but she looked up inquiringly into Mrs. Catherine's face.

"I said nothing of the lad coming home," said Mrs. Catherine firmly. "Alison Aytoun, ye are but a bairn, and will never be fashed, so far as I can see the lot before ye, by thoughts or purposes of a stern and troublous kind. It is other with you, Gowan, as I ken. This callant Archie Sutherland, has wasted with his riotous living the substance given in charge to him from his father, and from his father's God. It is not meet he should come back unscathed to this leisure and honour; it is right he should clear himself by labour and toil, no of the sin before God, which is atoned for in a holier way, but of the sin in the sight of man. I say, I also would be sinning against a justice, which neither fails nor alters, and discouraging strong hearts that held upon their warfare manfully, when he

fell under the hand of the adversary, were I bringing back Archie Sutherland at this time to the full honour and possessions of his father's house. I will let him stay in his trial and probation, Gowan, till he can show labour of his own hands, bravely done and like a man. The callant is nearer to my own heart than ever man was, but Sholto my one brother; but it is meet he should thole due justice after he has done evil."

Anne bowed her head in silent acquiescence: she did not speak. Mrs. Catherine was right.

"But this must be looked to without delay," said Mrs. Catherine, seating herself in her own great chair, while the gloaming shadows gathered darkly in the room; "we must buy his land back for him now. I will speak of it to Mr. Foreman this very night. Alison, go your ways, and sing to me the ballad of the wayfaring man."

And in the soft shadowy gloaming, little Alice seated herself at the piano, and began to sing.

You could scarcely perceive her fair head in the dreamy gloom of the large apartment. Further in, the red glow of the fire flickered ruddy on the stately form of Mrs. Catherine, bringing out with momentary flashes sometimes the shadow f her strong face in bold relief against the wall. Still more in the shade sat Anne, very still and thoughtful, looking at the old friend, and the young beside her, and thinking of others far away. Over them all were these low floating notes of music hopeful and sad—

> Thy foot is weary, thy cheek is wan,
> Come to thy kindred, wayfaring man !

Down stairs in the snug housekeeper's room, a little party was assembled, merrier and younger than were wont to be seen within that especial sanctum of the famous Mrs. Euphan Morison. Mrs. Euphan herself had gone to Portoran, to make provision of many things necessary for the jubilee and festivities, which in the ensuing week were to be holden in the Tower. She

was not to return till late that night, and Jacky had taken advantage of her absence.

Round the fire, in the early winter gloaming, sat little Bessie, Johnnie Halflin, Jacky herself and Flora Macalpine. There was to be a quiet *réunion* in the Tower that night, and Flora came, in attendance upon little Mary Fergusson, who was gaily engaged at that moment, in the hall, playing hide and seek with Lilie Rutherford.

The little company in the housekeeper's room were very merry. Jacky was repeating to them that sad adventure of Sir Artegall, which ended in his captivity to the most contemptuous of Amazons, the warlike Radigund; with whispers innumerable, and stifled laughter, her companions listened, or pretended to listen.

At that time, the gig from the Sutherland Arms, which had formerly conveyed James Aytoun to the Tower, was tumbling along the high-road in the same direction again. At

some little distance from the entrance to Mrs. Catherine's grounds, two gentlemen alighted, and dismissing it, ascended to the Tower.

One of them—he was bronzed by the beating of a sun more fervid than that of Scotland—was casting keen glances of joyous recognition round him—at the Tower—at Merkland—at a light in a high window there, which he fancied he knew, and still more eagerly at Strathoran in the dim distance. Its name had rung strangely in his ear from the tongue of the "crooked helper" at the inn, who drove their humble vehicle—"mony thanks to ye, Strathoran." It sent a thrill to the heart of Archibald Sutherland.

Yes, Archibald Sutherland! it was no other!

An older man leaned on his arm. In the darkness you could not distinguish particularly either his face or form; he was tall, with an elastic buoyant footstep, and was looking about

him in a singular abrupt way, now here, now there, like a man in a dream.

They approached the Tower door—it was closed. Archibald's friend had been eager hitherto, but now he lingered and seemed to wish delay. Archibald was entirely in the dark as to the reason. There was a ruddy light gleaming from a low window near at hand. The stranger drew near to look in, almost as if he knew it.

The room was full of the ruddy fire-light—the two dark figures at the window were quite unseen by those merry youthful people about the fire. Some one had slightly opened the window a little while before, for the room was very hot, and the door had been closed, that graver ears might not hear their laughter.

Jacky sat in the midst, her dark face glowing keen and bright. She was reciting vigorously that doleful adventure of the luckless Sir Artegall. The woman's weedes put upon him by the disdainful Amazon; the white apron—the distaff in his hand, "that he thereon should

spin both flax and tow;" his low place among the brave knights, whom he found "spinning and carding all in comely row;" and

> "—— forst through penury and pyne,
> To doe these works to their appointed dew,
> For nought was given them to sup or dyne,
> But what their hands could earn by twisting linen twyne."

A very sad thing, doubtless, for the hapless Sir Artegall, and furnishing very sufficient occasion for the "deep despight" and "secret shame" of his lofty and royal Lady Britomart, but by no means calculated to impress any deep feeling of pity or compassion upon that somewhat ungovernable knot of youngsters. Flora Macalpine, too kindly and good-humoured to hurt Jacky's feelings, had bent her head down upon her knee to hide her laughter; Johnnie Halflin leaned against the mantelpiece, shaking with secret earthquakes; Bessie had her head turned to the door, and was gazing at it steadily, and biting her rosy lip. They had

all an awe of Jacky. It would not do, however. That picture, with its gradual heightening; at last the sad honour of the unfortunate knight, steadily spinning in his woman's weedes, because his word was pledged to the despightful Radigund,—there was a general explosion—it was impossible to withstand that.

Jacky stopped suddenly, and withdrew from the laughers in lofty offence. She herself had a perception of the allegory, and was hurt and wounded at its reception, as we see greater people sometimes, whose myths a laughing world will persist in receiving as rather grotesque than sublime.

Jacky was almost sulky; she sat down in the shade, and turned her head resolutely away. Flora drew near to her in deprecatory humbleness. Jacky resisted and resented proudly.

Just then the door opened; the tall man, leaning on Archibald Sutherland's arm, gave a nervous start. Archibald had begun to

weary of his station here, at the window of the housekeeper's room. His friend and employer, Mr. Sinclair, was exhibiting a singular fancy to-night. He looked in wonderingly to see the reason of the sudden start.

It was only the entrance of two little girls; one of them blooming and ruddy, with radiant golden hair. The other paler, with a little frock of black silk, and eyes like the night —wistful, spiritual, dark.

"What ails Jacky?" said the new comer.

"Oh, if ye please, Miss Lilie," said Bessie eagerly, "we werena meaning ony ill; we only laughed."

Lilie slid gently within Jacky's arm—drew down the hand which supported her head, and whispered in her ear—the arm of Mr. Sinclair quivering all this time most strangely, as it leaned upon his friend's.

"Dinna be angry," whispered Lilie; "I want you to say Alice Brand. Mary never heard it;

never mind them. Say Alice Brand to Mary and me."

"Oh! ay, Jacky," echoed Bessie and Johnnie together, "say Alice Brand; it's a real bonnie thing."

Jacky was mollified; after a brief pause, caressing Lilie, she began the ballad. Little Mary Fergusson, with the fire-light gleaming in her golden hair, stood, leaning on the shoulder of her favourite Flora. Lilie was at Jacky's knee, lifting up her face of earnest childish interest, and listening with all her might. Without, in the darkness stood the stranger, eagerly looking in, and holding Archibald's arm.

The first notes of Alice Aytoun's song were sounding up stairs. Archibald Sutherland stood still, but with eyes that wandered somewhat, and a considerable weariness. This was a most strange freak of Mr. Sinclair's—he could not comprehend it.

Her story possessed Jacky, and inspired her.

She rose as it swelled to its climax, and spoke louder.—

"It was between the night and day
When the fairy folk have power,
That I fell down in a sinful fray,
And twix't life and death was snatched away,
To the joyless elfin bower.

But wist I of a woman bold,
Who thrice my brow durst sign,
I might regain my mortal mould
As fair a form as thine.

She crossed him once, she crossed him twice,
That lady was so brave;
The fouller grew his goblin hue,
The darker turned the cave.

She crossed him thrice, that lady bold,
He rose beneath her hand,
The fairest knight on Scottish mold,
Her brother, Ethert Brand!

'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in good greenwood."—

The quick elfin eye shot a glance out into

the darkness, and saw the listening figures there; the well-known face of young Strathoran! Jacky steadily finished the verse—committed Lilie into the hands of Flora Macalpine, and shutting the door of the house-keeper's room carefully behind her, opened the outer one, and admitted the strangers.

She conducted them up stairs in her own still, excited, elfin way; the fumes of the ballad hanging about her still. Mr. Sinclair grasped Archibald's arm, as they reached the door of the inner room, and held him back. The plaintive hopeful music was floating out again upon the soft shadows of the darkening night.

> "Speed thy labour o'er land and sea,
> Home and kindred are waiting for thee."

They entered, Jacky gliding in before them to light the candles which stood upon the table. Mrs. Catherine started up in overwhelming surprise—so did Anne and Alice. There was a loud exclamation, "Whence come ye, callant,

and what brings ye hame?" and a confused uncertain welcoming of Archibald. Then they became calmer, and he introduced Mr. Sinclair. At this stranger, Jacky when she brought the lights, had thrown a long, keen scrutinising glance. There seemed an agitated uncertainty about him, which contrasted strangely with his firm lip and clear eye. They were seated again at last. A mysterious agitation had fallen upon them all, which Archibald could not comprehend. To this new-comer Mrs. Catherine's large gray eyes were travelling continually. Anne, with nervous timid glances, turned to him again and again. Mr. Sinclair himself, generally so frank, and full of universal sympathies, was confused and tremulous, speaking incoherently, and saying things which had no meaning; Archibald was greatly astonished —even little Alice Aytoun began to steal shy glances at the stranger.

Archibald made a sign to Anne, and rising went out—Anne followed. He was in high spirits, great in hope, and with prospects more

cheering than he had ever dreamt of. He began to speak of them as she met him at the door.

"Who is he? who is he?" exclaimed Anne eagerly.

Archibald looked at her in amazement. "My employer and friend, Mr. Sinclair, Anne. What is the matter? I have come home with him at his own special desire. He intends —"

Jacky had been hovering on the stairs. She came up to the door where they were standing, and looked at them wistfully, "Oh if ye please, Miss Anne—"

"What is it, Jacky?"

Jacky could not tell what it was. She sat down on the stair, and put her hands up to her face, and began to cry—her excitement overpowering her.

"I cannot bear this," said Anne, wringing her hands nervously. "Jacky," she whispered in her ear—the girl shot down stairs like a spirit.

"Anne!" exclaimed Archibald, "something ails you. I beg you to tell me what it is."

"Afterwards — afterwards —" said Anne, hastily. "Go in now, Archibald. Jacky, come—"

Jacky returned, leading little Lilie by the hand. Archibald in silent amazement, went in again to the inner drawing-room. Anne followed him with the child, her face deadly pale, her form trembling.

Mrs. Catherine had changed the position of the lights on the table—one of them threw the profile of the stranger in clear shadow on the wall—she was looking with a singular scrutiny on the face, and on the shade of it. Little Alice Aytoun looked almost afraid. Mr. Sinclair was as confused and agitated as ever.

Lilie came in—she drew near Archibald timidly, with some remembrance of having seen him before; behind her, Anne stood in stiff excitement, watching her motions.

Suddenly the child's quick eye caught the stranger. Mr. Sinclair's arms moved tremulously. Lilie looked—wavered—turned back—looked again, her dark eyes dilating—her face full of childish earnestness. The time—the distance—the slight child's-memory—these did not make darkness enough, to veil from her remembrance the well-known face. The child sprang forward to the arms of the strong man, who sat trembling there under her simple scrutiny; she uttered a cry—Anne only could distinguish the latter words of it—they were enough, "My papa!"

And Mrs. Catherine rose, drawing up her stately figure to its full height, in solemn, judicial dignity, and advanced to the side of the father and child, "I bid ye joyous, righteous, peaceful welcome; Norman Rutherford, I bid ye welcome to your own name and land!"

And this was he! after eighteen years of labour and pain and banishment—an assumed name, a strange country, a toilsome life—in

joy and peace and honour, Norman Rutherford had returned again to his own fatherland.

But their joy was too deep and still to bear recording; the manner of their rejoicing, the forms of their thankfulness were not such as we can dwell on. The serenity of deep and holy happiness, the exuberance of new-found blessings!—we cherish those things too deeply in our inmost hearts to speak of them; for we are very still, when we are very blessed, in Scotland!

At Portoran he had left Christian, Marion, and his son. He had promised to return to them immediately, with Anne and Lilie. Mrs. Catherine's carriage was ordered for them, and they drove round by Merkland. Anne sat, her heart beating joyously, by the side of her new-found brother. Little Lilie was nestling in the darkness in her father's arm, pouring forth a stream of questions about mamma and Lawrie. All the three were half weeping yet, in the tumult and excitement of their joy. The past, with all that was dark and painful

in it, was lost in the present brightness; peace, security—the bond of tender and near relationship no longer a secret thing, but recognised now in joy and triumph, an abiding gladness all their days. The brother and sister united now for the first time in their lives, felt no restraining chillness of new acquaintanceship. They knew each other, and rejoiced, with tender pride and thanksgiving, in their kindred.

They stopped at Merkland—leading his child by the hand, and supporting Anne on his arm, Norman Rutherford entered the house of his fathers. His naturally buoyant step was restrained by a grave dignity; the memory of the dead hung over these walls—a thousand sad and potent remembrances were rising in the exile's heart—but withal he had been *doubted* here. He knew that, as it seemed instinctively, and drawing his sister's hand more closely through his arm, they entered Mrs. Ross's sitting-room together.

He stood gravely at the door waiting for his welcome. Lilie looked up wonderingly in

his face; he held her hand with such gentle firmness, that she could not run to the wondering grand-mamma, who sat there staring suspiciously at the new comers. Mrs. Aytoun rose—neglected wives, sad and sorrowful, remember those who feel for their hidden troubles delicately. She came forward, she looked at him, she held out her hands, "Welcome, welcome home."

Mrs. Ross was looking at him now eagerly. James and Lewis had both risen—so did she. "Who is this, Anne?" exclaimed Lewis: "Lilie, who is this gentleman?"

Mrs. Ross's better angel visited her for that white moment. She advanced before either Anne or Lilie could answer. "It is your brother, Lewis—your brother Norman; Norman, you are welcome home."

And then a subdued and tender radiance came shining from the eyes of the returned son. He led Mrs. Ross to her chair—he called her mother. In the revulsion of his generous heart, thinking he had done her wrong, he

forgot the dark wedding-day ong ago which had brought her, a strange ruler, to Merkland, and which he spent by his own mother's grave. With Lilie on the little stool at her feet, and Norman doing her reverence, and all the rest joyous and glad about her, Mrs. Ross forgot it also.

He was to return to Merkland, she insisted, with his wife, their sister, and their son. The old house would hold them all. Norman's dark eyes brightened into deep radiance. He kissed the harsh step-mother's hand—he had done her wrong.

Then he drew Anne's arm through his own once more, and leaving Lilie in the carriage, in charge of Mrs. Catherine's careful coachman, went down Oranside to Esther Fleming's cottage; but in Esther's recognition there was neither pause nor doubt. The manly bronzed cheek, the dark hair with its streaks of grey—she did not linger to look at these. She heard the light elastic step, the voice so dearly known of old—and it was her beautiful laddie,

her bairn, her son—not the grave man, who had more than reached the highest arch of his life—about whose neck the old woman threw her withered arms, as she lifted up her voice and wept.

At last they reached Portoran. The Marion, the little sister of Christian Lillie, had a face of thoughtful gracious beauty, such as gladdens the eye and heart alike; a saintly peaceful face, in which the strength of Christian and the weakness of Patrick were singularly blended, for she was like them both. The plough of sorrow had not carved its iron furrows on her fair brow, as it had done on Christian's. The sunshine of her smile was only chastened with natural tears for the dead brother who had gone to his rest; he was not her all in all as he had been Christian's.

No, for the little girl rejoicing in a childish exuberance of joy and tenderness already in her arms; the beautiful, bold, gallant boy, who stood beside her chair; the radiant dark face of the father and husband looking upon them with

tremulous delight and pride—had all a share. Christian too, whose heroic work was done, and the new-found sister Anne; there was warm room for them all in the large heart of Marion Rutherford. The burning fire of bitter grief had not intensified her love upon one—she was the family head, the house-mother—full of all gracious affections and sympathies, hopes and happiness.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A hundred thousand welcomes! I could weep,
And I could laugh; I am light and heavy. Welcome!"
CORIOLANUS.

Mrs. Ross was inspired—how or by what means we are not sufficiently good metaphysicians to be able to specify—but inspired she was! It might be that all the court that had been paid to her of late had softened the adamantine heart: it only concerns us to know that softened it was. She took immediate counsel with May; she had fires lighted in half a dozen bed-chambers. Then the wainscotted parlour was made radiant—a fire in its grate

"enough," as Duncan said with an involuntary grumble, "to keep the decent folk at the Brig of Oran in eilding frae this till Candlemas"—and additional candles upon its table. Then Mrs. Ross did something more wonderful than all this—the very climax and copestone of her unwonted melting of heart. She sent Duncan mysteriously up stairs to the attic lumber-room with secret instructions. May and Barbara lingered in wonder to see what was coming.

A great thing was coming—covered with dust, and grumbling audibly, Duncan re-appeared in ten minutes, carrying in his arms a picture — the portrait of the lost son of the house of Merkland — the boy's face of the exiled Norman, dethroned from its standing in his father's house for eighteen weary years.

It was restored again now, and when Mrs. Ross having dismissed the servants sat down alone in her bright room, through the dark polished walls of which the warm lights were gleaming pleasantly, to wait for her guests;

the unclouded sunshine of the bold, frank, fearless boy's face shone upon her for the first time. It had enough of the indefinite family resemblance, to bring her own Lewis before her mind. Lewis had gone up to the Tower, but was to return immediately. His mother sat in the parlour alone, more cheerily than was her wont, for the blood was warming about her heart.

And then they arrived—the whole of them—with all their different manifestations of joy; the mother Marion starting in delight at what she thought the portrait of her own bright Lawrie and Norman himself heaping up in such generous measure his delicate amends of honour and attention to the step-mother, whom he fancied he had wronged. She remembered him so different once, in his impetuous youth, that the compliment was all the greater now.

Christian and Anne sat by the fire in a quiet corner. Lawrie, proud of his new kindred, and bashfully exultant over them all, hovered between

them and the uncle Lewis, whose good looks and independent young manhood already powerfully attracted the boy: while on either side of Mrs. Ross herself sat Norman and Marion, and Lilie, loyal to the newly-come mamma, joining her childish talk to theirs; and all so willing and eager to do honour to the head of the household—the sole remnant of an older generation. Deep peace fell upon Merkland that night in all its many chambers—deeper than had been there before for years.

The evening was not far spent when Archibald Sutherland stole in among them, not unwelcome, and with him to the gate of Merkland — no further — came Marjory Falconer; she had one word to say to Anne. Anne went to her at the gate; it was almost a relief in all this gladness to have a minute's breathing time.

"I came to congratulate you, Anne," said Marjory breathlessly. The moon was up, and at some little distance a tall dark shadow fell across the Oran, which Anne smiled to see.

"To wish you manifold joy of all the arrivals—*all*, Anne. If I come down to-morrow, will you introduce me to your brother?"

"Surely, Marjory," said Anne, "but why not come to-night?"

"I might have come if you had married Ralph," said Marjory laughing, "but as it is, a stranger must not intermeddle with your joy. No, no—but I shall come to see them all to-morrow. By the by—"

"What, Marjory?"

"Oh, not much—only speaking of Ralph—I have found her at last; I have fairly laid my hands upon her. To-morrow I shall have her safely housed in Falcon's Craig!"

"Who is it?—what do you mean?"

"The daughter of Nimrod! the mighty huntress! I have got her all safe, Anne. I invite you to a wedding at Falcon's Craig in three months. I give them three months to do it in."

"You should know the necessary time," said

Anne smiling. "Shall there not be two, Marjory?"

"Hush," said Marjory gaily, "or I will retaliate. Now I must go. Mrs. Catherine is quite out of sorts for the want of you, Anne; and Alice is drooping as prettily as possible. Why did not your Norman come last night, and then we might—all of us—have rejoiced over him at the Tower?"

The next morning, the first excitement of their joy over, the three sisters sat together in the Merkland parlour. Mrs. Ross was superintending various domestic matters. Lewis was at the Tower. Norman had gone out with his son. Christian, Marion, and Anne were sitting together, with Lilie on her stool at their feet, communing "of all that was in their heart"—and that was much.

"It was very strange to us," said Marion, "I cannot tell you how strange, to hear from Mr. Sutherland—of Merkland, of you, of ourselves. He told us our own story — so

much as he knew of it, and sought our sympathy and pity for his friends. Strangely — most strangely—did we feel as he spoke."

"I did not think Archie would have spoken of a thing so private," said Anne.

"Nay, do not blame him," said Marion. "He saved our Lawrie's life a few days after his arrival; and that of course, even if he had possessed fewer good qualities of his own, must have at once opened our hearts, and our house to him. But we liked him for himself, and he seemed to like us; and then as we knew him better, the home he spoke of, the names he mentioned, were very music to Norman's ears. I cannot tell you, Anne—you cannot fancy—how your brother has longed and yearned for the home we dared not return to."

There was a pause.

"And then," continued Marion, "as he gradually became a member of our family, and a very dear friend, we gradually received his confidence. He spoke one night of 'little Alice Aytoun.' The name startled us both.

Norman asked who she was—and then, Anne—by degrees we heard our own story—very sad and mysterious he thought it, although he knew not, Christian, the half of its sadness. But Anne, he said, was convinced of the innocence of her dead brother, and was full of hope for the vindication of his memory. 'Who is Anne?' I asked. Mr. Sutherland looked astonished for a moment, and then slightly embarrassed. He seemed to think it strange that there should be any one who did not know Anne; and, sister Anne, he did you justice. We were strangely excited that night, Norman and I. I could not prevail upon him to go to rest. He walked about the room with a mixture of joy and fear on his face, that only people who have known such a position as ours could realize, repeating to himself, 'Anne—the child—my little sister Anne!' It was balm to him to think that you had faith in him, and hope for him; and yet he was full of fear lest he should endanger"—

Marion paused—the tears came into her eyes; she looked at Christian.

"Go on, Marion," said Christian, leaning her head upon her hand, "Go on—he is safe now, and past all peril."

"Our poor Patrick!" exclaimed his younger sister, "my gentle, broken-hearted, sad brother! At that time when the eighteenth year was nearly past, Norman was afraid—Norman was full of terror, lest any exertion made for him should disturb the peace of Patrick. He was as willing to suffer for him then, as he was when he went away—that terrible time!"

"Do not think of it," said Christian. "We are all at peace now, Marion, living and dead; and he the safest, peacefullest, most joyous of us all."

"And then he told us of Lilie," said Marion after a long silence, "and how you, Anne, became attached to the little stranger child; and we listened, endeavouring to look as if we did not know or care—I wonder at myself how I succeeded."

"And did you never tell him?" said Anne.

"No, Norman reserved it as a surprise to him when they should reach Strathoran. He wondered, I could see, why we were so anxious to come here, but he did not ask. Norman regards him almost as a younger brother. He is very anxious that he should have a situation more suitable for him, than the one he held at Buenos Ayres; but he will tell you his arrangements himself;—where is Norman?"

He was out, no one knew where he was.

He was at that moment stooping his lofty head, to enter the door-way of a solitary cottage —a very mean and poor one—at some distance from the Brig of Oran. Its inhabitant in former days, had known Mr. Norman of Merkland well. She had been an old woman when he left home—she was a very old woman, decrepid and feeble, now; yet on the first day after his return, his kindly remembrance of old days carried the restored Laird, the great merchant, to the cottage of the "old Janet," who

had given him apples and bannocks in his youth.

And in the long walk they took, the father and son made many similar visits, to the great amazement of Lawrie, who, knowing his father a reserved grave man, called proud by strangers, was very greatly at a loss how to account for these many friendships. The hearty kindliness of these old cottage people, in which there was fully as much affection as awe, and the frank familiarity of his father, puzzled Lawrie mightily. He did by no means understand it.

They had begun with Esther Fleming's house—they ended with the Tower. Between these two, besides the cottage visitations we have mentioned, with all the joyful wonder of their recognitions, they visited a grave—a grave which had received another name since Norman Rutherford left his fatherland, and on which Lawrie read with awe and reverence, names of his ancestry the same as his own, and near the end, that of "Lawrence Ross, aged 15," his own age, who was his uncle.

In the meantime, at a solemn private conference in the little room, Mrs. Catherine was receiving Archibald's report.

"Mr. Sinclair's proposal to me," said Archibald, "is of so liberal a kind that I feel almost ashamed to accept it. Mr. Lumsden, the manager at Glasgow, has been received as junior partner into the firm, and is intended to succeed Mr. Sinclair at Buenos Ayres. Mr. Sinclair offers me Mr. Lumsden's situation in Glasgow, in the meantime, as he says, with a speedy prospect of entering the house. He himself intends to withdraw, and he talks of my chance of taking his place in the firm. This for me, who went out a poor clerk only a year ago, looks ridiculously Utopian; but the managership—Mr. Lumsden's situation, is sure—and *it* is higher than, in ordinary circumstances, I could have hoped to rise for years."

"I am blythe of it—I am heartily blythe to hear it, Archie," said Mrs. Catherine. "That ye should leave your lawful labour is no desire of mine; but I have that to tell that concerns

ye more than even this. Have ye heard any tidings yet, of the cattle ye left in Strathoran?"

Archibald changed colour, and said "No."

"Then it has not been told you that your father's house is within your reach again; that Strathoran is to be sold."

"To be sold!" Archibald started to his feet; his temples began to throb, his heart to beat—within his reach and yet how very far removed, for where could he find means to redeem his inheritance. "To be sold!"

"Yes, Archie Sutherland, to be sold—what say ye to that?"

He did not say anything to it; he pressed his hand to his brow and groaned.

"What ails ye? sit down upon your seat this moment, and hearken to me; what say ye to that?"

"I have nothing to say, Mrs. Catherine; it takes from me my great hope. There is no possibility of recovering it now, and what chance is there of any opportunity again. It

is not likely to change hands thrice in one life-time."

"Archie," said Mrs. Catherine, "ye are but a silly callant, after all. I thought not to have seen the beads on your brow for this matter. Sit down upon your seat I bid ye, and hearken to me. I am not without siller as ye ken, seeing it is no such great space of time since a Laird of Strathoran made petition to me, to serve him in this Mammon; that ye should have forgotten. I was slow then, for ye were in the way of evil, Archie; but ill as ye were, ye ken I was near tempted to cast away my siller, into the self-same mire in which ye lost Strathoran, for the sake of Isabel Balfour and him that was her trysted bridegroom. Now, Archie Sutherland, it is my hope that your e'en are opened to see the right weird of man; which is not idleset and the mean pleasures of it, but honourable work and labour that the sun may shine upon, and God and your fellows see. Think not that I mean the making of siller; I mean a just work, whatsoever is

appointed ye, to be done in honour and bravery, and in the fear of God. So as it is my hope ye perceive this at last, ye shall have your lands again, Archie. No that I desire ye to return to Strathoran, as if ye had never done ill. Go your ways and labour: ye will return a better and a blyther man, that ye have redeemed your inheritance with the work of your own hands. In the meantime, I myself will redeem it for you; I give ye back the name your fathers have borne for ages. See that it descends to your bairns for their inheritance, Strathoran. And now I see Norman Rutherford at the door; go and take counsel with him for your further travail, and leave me to my meditations."

And with kindly violence Mrs. Catherine shut the door of her sanctuary upon the bewildered Archibald—then she seated herself opposite the portrait of her brother, and gazed upon it long and earnestly. "Ay, Sholto Douglas, he is Isabel's son, and what would you have left undone for the bairn of Isabel?—and if he

had been yours also, what is there within the compass of mortal might, that I would have halted at for him? He is Isabel's son—an it had not been ordered in a darker way, he would have been your first-born, Sholto Douglas; the shadow of your tenderness is upon the callant—he has none in this earth so near to him as me."

That day, there were various visitors at Merkland—Mrs. Catherine, the Aytouns, Marjory Falconer; they met together at night in the Tower, all joyous, hopeful, and at peace.

But in the vicinity of the Tower, that evening, there hovered a knot of stalwart men, uncertain as it seemed whether to enter or no. The younger ones were for pressing forward; the most eager among them was Angus Macalpine, himself longing to become the head of a household, and remembering Flora's limit "no till we get back to the glen;" but the highest and most potent of the group hung back.

"Man, Duncan, we're no wanting to vex him. I've as muckle honour for the Laird as

ony man o' my name—only it's our right to have an answer. If he's no gaun to buy back the land, maybe we could make favour wi' whaever does. We belong to the ground, and the ground to us, Duncan—we've a right to seek an answer at the hands of our chief."

"It a' sounds very just that, Angus," said Big Duncan Macalpine; "but the Laird's a distressed man, that hasna siller to give for the redemption of his inheritance and ours. Think ye onything but extremity could have garred him tine the lands as he did? or think ye there can be siller enough gathered in ae year to buy back Strathoran? I tell ye, lads, I ken the Laird, and if he's maybe wasted his substance like a prodigal—I dinna dispute he has, and we're a' bearing the burden—he keeps aye a kind heart. Now, here are we, coming to him, young men and auld of us, that have been hunted from our hames. He kens it's his wyte, and he kens he canna mend it; and what can we do but gie him a sair heart, and what can he say but that it grieves him? If he had

the power we wad be hame again the morn but he hasna the power, and wherefore should we make his cup bitterer wi' putting our calamity before him and saying it's his blame?"

The reasoning of Big Duncan was strong like himself—the men fell back—but Angus was still eager.

"The auld man at the ingleside wrestles night and day to get quiet deein' in his ain house in the glen. He's wandered in his mind since ever yon weary day—aye, when he's no at his exercise—he's clear enough then; and if ye heard him, just to get hame that he may fa' asleep in peace, ye wadna be sae faint-hearted. I'm no meaning that you're faint-hearted either; but the Laird hasna had sae muckle thought o' us, that we should be sae mindfu' o' him."

"You're an inconsiderate lad, Angus," said Big Duncan; "but for the auld man's sake we may wait a while here. Maybe the Laird may pass this gate—yonder's somebody."

"It's the Laird," exclaimed Angus—forward as he had been before, he shrank back now.

The man who had opposed the measure was left to be the spokesman.

Archibald had observed them from a window, and came towards them rapidly. Duncan lifted his bonnet—no servile sign, as smaller spirits in the arrogance of their so-called equality would assert, but the independent respect of an honourable poor man, who in his chief's good fame had an individual stake, and was himself honoured. He was at some loss how to frame his speech.

"I trust," said Archibald, hastily, "I trust I shall have it in my power very shortly to redress your wrongs. You have suffered innocently—I justly; but we have both had some trials of faith and patience since we last met. Trust me the power shall not be in my hands a moment sooner than the will, to make amends to you for your loss—the bitterest hour of all this bitter twelvemonth was the one in which I heard of your wrong. There are two months yet between us, and the time which shall decide

the proprietorship of Strathoran. I hope then, through my friend's help, to be able to redeem my inheritance and yours—if I succeed, have no fear—I will not spend an hour in unnecessary delay till you again enter Oranmore in peace."

These men did not cheer him—we are by no means loud in our demonstrations in Scotland—but their rough features moved and melted, and some eyelids swelled full. Archibald was a little excited too.

"So far as I have caused this, Macalpines, you forgive your chief?" He held out his hand—it was grasped with a silent fervour which spoke more eloquently than words. Tall Angus Macalpine, who touched his chief's hand last of all, could have thrown himself down at his feet, and craved his pardon. He did not do that; but would have rejoiced with mighty joy, as he flew down Oranside that night, to tap at the nursery window of Woodsmuir and carry Flora the news, to have had an opportunity of

douking, knocking down, or in any way discomfiting "ony man that daured to mint an ill word of the Laird!"

Upon the appointed day little Alice Aytoun was married—Ada Mina Coulter, as having experience of the office, serving her in the capacity of bridesmaid, while Anne and Marjory were merely lookers on; the latter not without consideration of the proprieties of this same momentous ceremony, so soon to be repeated in a case where she could not be merely a spectator.

For Marjory's bold experiment was succeeding beautifully. Her visitor, Sophy Featherstonehaugh, the mighty huntress over whom she exulted, was half a Northumbrian, and half a maiden of the Merse—the daughter of a fox-hunting Squire, a careless, good-humoured, frank, daring girl, who could guide a vicious horse, or sing you "a westerly wind, and a cloudy sky," with any sportsman in the land. Poor Sophy was an only child—motherless from

her infancy; the lands of her weak, boisterous, indulgent father were strictly entailed, and he seemed to have deadened any fatherly anxieties he might have had for leaving his daughter penniless, by fooling her to the top of her bent, so long as he remained lord of his own impoverished acres. But he died at last—and with an immense mastery over horses, and sufficiently cunning in all sports of the field to have filled the place of huntsman to some magnifico, and withal with a dowry of two hundred pounds, Sophy Featherstonehaugh, the daughter of an old and honourable family, was thrown upon the charities of the world.

A precise aunt in Edinburgh, with a great nursery-full of children, gave her a reluctant invitation. The innocent lady fancied Sophy's services might be turned to good account as a sort of unpaid nursery-governess. She was not long in discovering her mistake. Sophy had not been a week in charge, when the walls of the nursery rang with a shrill "Tally-ho!" of

many juvenile voices. The next morning, Master Harry demanded from his astonished papa a horse, and coolly proposed turning over his pony to his sister, little Sophy, who earnestly seconded the embryo sportsman. Their mother was dismayed. She resolved to have a solemn forenoon conference with her unpaid nursery-governess, to ascertain what all this meant. When she reached the schoolroom-door, she paused to listen. Alas! it was not any lesson that kept that little group so steadily round their teacher. It was one of those barbarous ballads with which a "northern harper rude" horrified the ears of the cultured Marmion, in Norham's castled keep, celebrating the exploits of a Featherstonehaugh. The aunt stood horror-stricken at the door—not long, however, for Sophy, with her loud, frank, good-humoured voice, was already transgressing still more unpardonably, and in a moment after the boisterous chorus of "A hunting we will go—eho—eho—eho!" pierced the ears of the hapless

mother, ringing from the shrill, united voices of all her children.

There was no more to be said after that: in unutterable wrath, poor Sophy was sent off immediately, in spite of her indignant remonstrances, and her twenty years, to a boarding-school in the neighbourhood of Strathoran, the principal of which was informed of her past riotous behaviour, and begged, with much bitterness by the aunt, to do what she could to make the girl human.

The girl's bold spirit rose at this—she, a Featherstonehaugh! But she had no kindred in the wide world to turn to, and even her poor two hundred pounds was mulcted for the payment of the year's stipend to the boarding-school. In these circumstances, Marjory Falconer became acquainted with her, and in a week thereafter, free from all governesses, or attempts to humanize, the bold Featherstonehaugh was triumphantly reining the wildest horse in the Falcon's Craig stables, while Ralph

rode in delight and admiration by her side, and Marjory, standing at the door, said, joyously, within herself:

"She has a firm hand—she can hold the reins—she will do!"

Marjory was by far too wise, however, to trust Ralph with her intention; but she made much of the frank, good-humoured Sophy, and looked forward in good hopes.

The day arrived for the re-purchase of Strathoran, and Mr. Foreman and Mr. Fergusson, in the absence of all competitors, joyfully redeemed the inheritance of Archibald Sutherland, at a price considerably below its real value.

"Come light—gang light," said the lawyer, emphatically. "We give them more for it than they gave us."

There had been negotiations entered into with the Southland sheep-farmer, whose farm comprised the glen of Oranmore, and he readily accepted in lieu of it, for the justice sake, and to oblige the Laird, an equal extent of land

elsewhere. In wild eagerness, the Macalpines threw themselves into their glen, and wrought so furiously at their dismantled houses, that in a very short time after the sale the longed-for homes stood complete again, ready for the joyful flitting.

And then, upon a balmy day of early April the clansfolk returned, in solemn procession, to their home. The bustle of removal was over—the lofty tone of those mountain people made a grave ceremonial of their return. In the glen, beneath the soft, blue sky, and genial spring sunshine, they gathered together to thank God; and, with the blue heights rising over them, and the fair low-country swelling soft and green at their feet, and the peaceful cottar houses round, with fire upon their hearths, and lowly, protecting roofs once more, they lifted up their voices in psalms:

"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place
In generations all,
Before Thou ever hadst brought forth
The mountains great and small.

Ere ever Thou hadst formed the earth,
Or all the world abroad,
Even Thou from everlasting art
To everlasting God."

And then, their minister standing by the while, Duncan Macalpine the elder, of Oranmore, rendered thanks to God.

Archibald Sutherland denied himself this gladness. It invigorated him in the dingy manager's room of the Glasgow counting-house to hear of it, but he felt he had no claim to the triumph. Mr. Fergusson was there, radiant with honest glee, and Mr. Lumsden from Portoran, his face covered with a dark glow of simple delight and sympathy. And there was little Lilie, and Mary Fergusson, solemnly invited to take tea with Flora and Angus, on their first entry into their new house, and Anne and Marjory, with Lawrie for their gallant, were in charge of the children, and a straggling background of well-wishers from Merkland and the Tower, filled up the rear.

The months wore peacefully on. Esther

Fleming's son had returned to her, and only did not become captain of a schooner, which called Norman owner now, because he had enough, and preferred comfortably dwelling at home, greatly honoured by his foster-brother, and very proud of the relationship, while, withal, his mother's little housekeeper-niece did so seriously incline to hear his stories of sea perils and victories, that the rustic neighbours already in prophetic anticipation, had some half dozen times proclaimed the banns of William Fleming.

Norman Rutherford and his family were settled peacefully in the now bright and cheerful house of Redheugh. Anne was with them. Little Alice, the blythest of young wives, kept Merkland bright and busy. There was word in Edinburgh of some rich young Indian lady, who had thrown her handkerchief on James.

And before the three months were fully expired, Anne Ross accepted Marjory Falconer's invitation, and was present at a wedding-party in Falcon's Craig. A double wedding—at which Mr. Lumsden, of Portoran, placed in the stout

hand of Sophy Featherstonehaugh the reins of the ruder animal Ralph Falconer, of Falcon's Craig, and immediately thereafter submitted in his turn to the same important ceremony, performed in his case by the brother Robert, of Gowdenleas, in the midst of an immense assemblage of kindred, Andrew of Kilfleurs standing by.

And prosperous were these weddings. Good-humoured, kindly, and of tolerable capacity, the bold Sophy had improved under her sister-in-law's powerful tutorage. She *had* a firm hand. The boisterous Ralph felt the reins light upon him, yet was kept in bounds, and by-and-by Sophy left the management of wild horses entirely in his hands. She got other important things to manage—obstreperous atoms of humanity, wilder than their quadruped brethren, and scarce less strong.

And with her old chimeras scattered to the winds, in lofty lowliness, and chastened strength, Marjory Falconer entered her Manse, the minister's stout-hearted and pure-minded wife.

One hears no more of the rights of women now—bubbles of such a sort do not float in the rare atmosphere of this household—there is nothing in them congenial with the sunshine of its blythe order and freedom.

For granting that our Calvinism is gloomy, and our Presbyterian temperament sour, one wonders how universal this household warmth and joyousness should be beneath the roof-trees of those strong, pure men, whom the intolerant world upbraids with the names of bigot, hypocrite, and pharisee. One could wish to have this same intolerant bigot world make a tour of these Scottish Manses, from which it might return, perchance, able to give a rational judgment on the doctrine and order of Christ's Holy Evangel, as we have held it in Scotland from the days of our fathers until now; at least might have its evil speaking hushed into silence before the devout might, which labours for the hire, not of silver and gold, but of saved souls —and the sunny godliness which is loftiest gain.

There is a rumour in the Lumsden family that, upon one evening shortly after the marriage, a certain chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, containing, a verse which married ladies do mightily stumble at, was read in regular course: on which occasion, says the mirthful Sister Martha of the Portoran Manse, one could detect the shadow of a comic inflection in the voice of the household priest, while his wife with a certain grave doggedness, slightly bowed her strong head before the unpalatable command.

We cannot tell how the truth of this story may be, but Sister Martha laughs when she tells it, and Marjory blushes her violent blush, and the minister looks on with his characteristic smile of simple unsophisticated glee. But we can vouch for it, that Mrs. Lumsden of Portoran has become a renowned church-lawyer, mighty in the "Styles," and great in the forms of process; whose judgment maintains itself triumphantly in face of a whole Synod, and whose advice in complicated matters, of

edicts, or calls, or trials, youthful reverends scant of ecclesiastical jurisprudence, would do well to take.

Only there is growing up in the Manse of Portoran a host of little sun-burnt, dark-haired heads—all prosperity and increase to the sparkling eyes and bold brows of them!—over whose rejoicing band a little fairy sister, the joy of the minister's heart, exercises her capricious sway, and sovereign tyranny. They are growing up, all of them, to call Marjory blessed—already for their generous nurturing "known in the gates" as hers—and hereafter still more to rejoice in the strong, gladsome, sunshiny nature to which they owe their healthful might and vigour. The prophecy and hope of her friend and counsellor is fulfilled in full: "Strength and honour are her clothing. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and in her lips is the law of kindness."

The months passed on, and lengthened into years. Archibald Sutherland, after good work in the manager's room, entered the firm

triumphantly as Norman's successor; before that, he had succeeded to the well-ordered house in the vicinity of Blythswood Square, which had been occupied by his predecessor Mr. Lumsden. People said it certainly needed a mistress, and very wonderful were the rapidity of those successive occasions, on which the Laird of Strathoran, clear-headed as men called him, found it absolutely necessary to repair to Redheugh to seek counsel of his friend.

His sister Isabel had made a brilliant marriage; they had scarcely any intercourse—unless some new misfortune should befall her she was lost to her early friends. Mrs. Catherine and Mr. Fergusson, under Mr. Coulter's advice, were managing his estate. Sentences oracular and mysterious were sometimes heard falling from Mrs. Catherine's lips, in which the names of "Archie" and "Gowan" were conjoined. The house of Strathoran had been thoroughly purified. Mrs. Catherine had made sundry important additions to its

plenishing; it was always kept in such order, that its now prosperous and rising possessor might return to it, at once. Anne was resident at the Tower sometimes, and knew of these processes. They tended to some new change in the eventful life of Archie Sutherland.

The Rosses of Merkland were visiting the Rutherfords of Redheugh. In the large sunny drawing-room, from whose ample windows sloped a lawn of close and velvet greensward, the whole family were assembled. The elder Mrs. Ross was mollified and melted; the younger gay and rejoicing. Lewis was in high spirits—under the regimen approved and recommended by Mr. Coulter, Lewis hoped to raise the rent-roll of Merkland a half more than it had ever been. You could see now in the large wistful dark eyes of Christian Lillie, only the subdued and serious tone proper to those who have borne great griefs without brooding over them. There was an aspect of serene peace and healthful pleasure

over all the house. The three sisters, Marion, Christian, and Anne, were sisters indeed.

Without was a merrier group. Lilie Rutherford, with her youthful gallant, Charlie Fergusson, now a High School boy, lodged in a closet of his brother Robert's rooms, and frequent in his Saturday visits to Redheugh; and Lawrie, growing a young man now, as he thought, and dubious as to the propriety of keeping company with lesser boys and girls, to whom he was very patronizing and condescending, stood by the sun-dial; while in the background was Jacky, now waiting gentlewoman to Miss Lilias Rutherford, a very great person indeed, and little Bessie, young Mrs. Ross of Merkland's own maid.

Lilie was coquetishly making inquiries of Bessie, touching the welfare of Harry Coulter, whereat Charlie Fergusson grew irate and sulky.

"And the young gentleman's biding at the Tower," said Bessie; "he's a lord noo his ainsel—and he's been twice at Harrows."

"Who is that?" said little Lilie.

"Oh, if ye please, Miss Lilie," said Jacky, "it's a young gentleman that was a lord's son, and now he's a lord himsel—and he's gaun to be married upon Mr. Harry's sister."

"Eh, Jacky, what gars ye say such a thing?" cried Bessie. "If ye please, Miss Lilie, naebody kens—only he's been twice at Harrows; but maybe he's no courting Miss Coulter for a' that."

"*I* should think not," exclaimed Charlie Fergusson, indignantly. "Ada Coulter married to a lord! Yes, indeed—and they can't talk of a single thing at Harrows but fat pigs, and prize cattle, and ploughing matches. Why, Lilie, do you mind what Harry gave you when you were at Merkland—a plough! what can ladies do with ploughs?"

"Mrs Catherine has a great many ploughs, Charlie," said Lilie, gravely—"and it was very good of Harry; and Mary and me might have played with it all our lane, and we would not have needed you. I dinna like boats—folk,

can plough at hame—but in boats they go over the sea."

"And, eh, Jacky!" exclaimed Bessie, curiously, as Charlie followed his capricious liege lady, to efface if he could this unfortunate recollection of Harry Coulter and his gift—"isna young Strathoran awfu' often at Redheugh?"

"He's here whiles," said Jacky, briefly.

"Johnnie Halflin says," said Bessie, "and it's a' through the parish—and folk say Mrs. Catherine's just waiting for't, and that it's to be in the Tower, and Mr. Lumsden is to do it, and Mrs. Lumsden kens a' about it—"

"About what?"

"Oh, ye just ken better than me for a' you'll no say—just that young Strathoran's coming out of yon muckle reekie Glasgow, hame to his ain house, and then he's to be married upon Miss Anne. Tell us, woman, Jacky—I'll never tell a mortal body again, as sure as I'm living."

Jacky's dark face lighted up—she knew this secret would bear telling, even though Bessie broke faith.

"We're a' gaun to the Tower at the New-year—like the time Redheugh came hame; Miss Lilie and Miss Anne, and a' the house—and young Strathoran's to be there too. And Miss Anne has gotten a grand goun, a' of white silk, shining like the snaw below the moon, and a shawl—ye never saw the like o't—it's as lang as frae Merkland to the Tower. And maybe something will happen then, and maybe no—Miss Anne wasna gaun to tell me!"

THE END.

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